

PUNK PLANET IS DEAD! LONG LIVE PUNK PLANET!

SEPTEMBER 2007

IN THESE TIMES

Farming in the
concrete **jungle**

Low **power** FM
to the **people**

THE **TRIAL** (AND ERRORS) OF **HUGO CHÁVEZ**



► **Steve Ellner reports from Venezuela**

PLUS:

Susan J. Douglas asks:

How can Laura Bush sleep at night?

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❖ He will advocate sharing the world's food and resources more equitably among nations...

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❖ He will call for massive emergency relief...

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❖ His public work will soon begin...

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WHO IS THIS MAN?

www.TheEmergence.org/itt

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Blogs Up, Hacks Down

OH, WHAT A difference a year makes. At the second annual YearlyKos conference in Chicago in early August, now-confident progressive bloggers played nice with journalists and political candidates, transcending the defensive attacks that marked last year's seminal gathering in Vegas. The appearance of seven Democratic presidential contenders demonstrated that the Kossacks and fellow A-listers—along with what the Liberal Blog Advertising Network calls their 3 million daily readers—are now ensconced as political players. This represents a marked (hopefully permanent) shift from the Democratic Party shutout of progressive voices that plagued the early '00s.

For media watchers, the novelty of the blogosphere has worn off. But this didn't faze attendees, who gamely trekked through the cavernous McCormick Place, blogging, vlogging, texting and Twittering their way through sessions.

A few days later, at the Journalism That Matters conference in D.C., reporters and editors from what are now known as "legacy" newspapers seemed chastened, ready to admit that journalism is broken and the fix is far from clear. On a Wiki and in small group exercises, they produced a proposal for the "next newsroom." Their prototype—a hodgepodge of moneymaking schemes and feel-good citizen engagement gimmicks—felt compared to the vigorous media experiments taking place across the country. While attendees were open to new ideas, they lacked the can-do spirit of the prog blogs, and instead banded about weasel words like "hyperlocalism."

The organizers of Journalism That Matters mean well, and they represent a current of reform within mainstream journalism. But what was lacking in D.C. was abundant in Chicago: a potent sense of shared mission and a gut-level understanding of how new technologies have already shattered the barriers between media-makers and citizens.

The bloggers and readers at the

YearlyKos conference don't all agree on politics or tactics—their approaches range from investigative journalism to rhetorical Molotov-throwing. They don't always know if they're practicing journalism—and don't care. They do know that the public demands accountability and truth-telling from media and government alike.

In contrast, Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of the *Wall Street Journal* is an insult that has compounded the near fatal injuries journalism has sustained. As one anonymous *WSJ* reporter told the *Los Angeles Times*, "It's a sickening realization to know that this really great iconic newspaper is no longer going to be independent, but is also going to be controlled by a man whose values are inimical to ours." Indeed, the reporters who aren't being laid off in droves at the behest of stockholders are finding that the meaning of their work has been sucked dry by the ever-expanding commercialization of the industry.

Yet the urge to connect to engaged thinkers through media of all kinds is alive and well. Everyday people, trained journalists, and everyone in between are using new technologies to tell stories, swap images, share information, interrogate powerbrokers and debate issues. Progressive media—too often stuck between the rock of the prog blogs' partisanship and the hard place of print journalism's financial woes—has benefited greatly from the amplification and sharing of stories that search tools and Web 2.0 enable.

Newspapers may have lost sight of why aggressive reporting and informed debate matter, but plenty of people see their importance and have jumped into the fray. And whatever these folks call themselves, there's work to do: A recent study by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press found that Americans are less able to answer basic questions about politics and foreign affairs than they were in 1989.

Journalism is dead! Long live journalism!

—Jessica Clark

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



\$3 billion: Amount of farm subsidies paid annually to 12,500 American cotton farmers

\$2,000: Average annual income of a West African, cotton-producing household of 10

12: Percentage decrease that U.S. subsidies cause in the world price of cotton

10 million: Number of West Africans that depend directly on cotton as their major source of income

6-14: Estimated percentage increase of the world price of cotton if the United States removed all cotton subsidies

“There is another way to live and think: it’s called agrarianism. It is not so much a philosophy as a practice, an attitude, a loyalty and a passion—all based in close connection with the land. It results in a sound local economy in which producers and consumers are neighbors and in which nature herself becomes the standard for work and production.”

—WENDELL BERRY

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

Last year, the health care industry lavished campaign contributions upon Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), showering her with nearly \$1.3 million. Among all congressional candidates, only former Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) received more of the industry’s largesse.

THE QUO:

Quo? There is no quo! Why, perish such cynical thoughts! As Clinton told the assembled bloggers at the

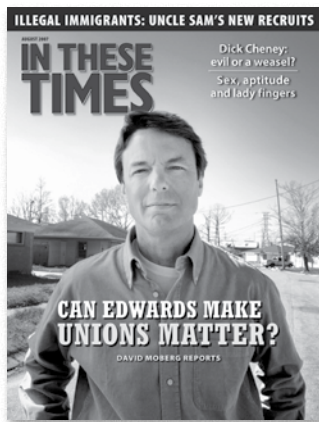
Yearly Kos Convention in August, “I don’t think, based on my 35 years of fighting for what I believe in, anybody seriously believes I’m going to be influenced by a lobbyist.” She added: “I just ask you to look at my record. I’ve been fighting for the same things. My core principles haven’t changed.”

Indeed, just ask Harvard law professor Elizabeth Warren, who persuaded Hillary to talk her husband into vetoing in 2000 a bankruptcy bill favorable to the credit card industry. When virtually the



same bill arrived on the Senate floor a year later, Sen. Clinton voted for it. Apparently, the \$140,000 the credit card industry sent her way had nothing to do with her reconsideration.

letters



Cheney: an insult to weasels

I want to apologize. Even as a subscriber, I guess I haven't really appreciated *In These Times* as a unique, progressive voice until I read the Susan J. Douglas' column "Is Cheney Evil or Just a Weasel?" (August).

As an animal behaviorist and organic farmer, I have learned to greatly respect members of the weasel family. Minks are smart, fast, ferocious and stealthy predators of our pastured hens. Minks find chinks in our hen house and dive quickly into snow tunnels during the winter, as I haplessly chase them with bare hands or a shovel. Forget traps—they smell them and are too smart to walk in. Defenses against these wily predators include vigilance, secure houses and open ground with multi-layered defenses.

I beg your pardon, but our U.S. electoral and commercial media system of vetting presidential and vice-presidential candidates based upon the "best-candidate-money-can-buy" rather than

free speech and investigative journalism is broken and filled with chinks. A panoply of predators live quietly in our hen house, taking whatever, whenever they want. I agree with Susan Douglas. Many scary bullies have weak, unreflective souls and poor characters. But Cheney is just a selfish, lying, cheating, stealing, criminal authoritarian fear monger. He is nothing like the smart, fast, take-what-you-want-and-get-out-of-here predatory weasels I

at Medea Benjamin at the World Social Forum ("Excerpt," August) were like the vandals from the so-called Black Bloc (if not ordinary hoodlums) that wrecked store fronts, set trash bins afire and created mayhem at the WTO 1990 protest, and then went into hiding, leaving innocent protesters to be arrested. Printing their inchoate and illiterate manifesto dignifies the acts of those who prefer violence to reasonable debate. Instead of banishing Medea

Blaming Nader for the 2000 election debacle and the subsequent slide toward tyranny is a convenient way for centrist Democrats to absolve themselves.

know and respect.

*Hal Bauer
Via e-mail*

Nader not responsible

I was disturbed to find Laura Washington repeating the shibboleth that Ralph Nader was the cause of George W. Bush's December 2000 victory in the Supreme Court in "Bloomberg Could Tie Centrists in Knots" (August).

Blaming Ralph Nader and his supporters for the 2000 election debacle and the subsequent slide toward tyranny is a convenient way for centrist Democrats to absolve themselves of responsibility for tolerating a coup d'état in 2000. I had expected better of *In These Times*.

*Laird W. Hastay
Forest Grove, Ore.*

Don't throw pies!

Those who threw pies

Benjamin's response to the web, you should have printed it in full and mentioned the pie thrower manifesto very briefly rather than giving it credibility.

*Lorna Salzman
East Quogue, N.Y.*

And don't bash organizing

Adam Doster has it all wrong in "When College Ends, So Does Activism" (July). My 40-year career as a progressive organizer has been deeply enriched by thousands of canvassers. Yes, canvassing involves low pay and long hours, but so are most entry-level jobs. But unlike most other jobs, canvassing builds progressive organizations. Canvassing also recruits average citizens for progressive organizations, thus creating one of the most important sources

of sustainable funding for the movement. With more funding, we could hire more people and pay them better!

In 1986, a Pennsylvania senate majority leader, a Republican from suburban Philadelphia: "I can always tell when your canvassers are in my district because it's the only time I consistently get constituent mail from people who aren't the 'usual suspects.'" That was high praise for a grassroots organizing approach that, while far from perfect, is effective both at winning on issues and building organization.

*Jeff Blum
Executive Director
USAction
Washington, D.C.*

Forget college

Once again, we read about how idealistic youths are forced to sell out by the need to pay their college debt in Adam Doster's "When College Ends, So Does Activism" (July). Yet there is a simple solution that never seems to get mentioned: Don't go to college! No law that says you must go to college, although parental and social pressure can be intense. There is a world of things that can be learned outside college, not the least of which is activism. Older and more experienced people will be happy to be your mentor for free. In our society, college serves mainly as a semi-obligatory middle-class rite of passage. It is a way for the System to grab you by the shorthairs. You have a choice. Say no. You don't have to go.

*David Stein
Chicago, Ill.*

contributors

Dear Reader,

With this issue all of us at 2040 N. Milwaukee bid farewell to Managing Editor Phoebe Connelly, who with Chelsea Ross wrote "Farming the Concrete Jungle" on page 20.

The morning after this issue went to press, Phoebe headed down to Midway International Airport, the first stop on her way to Washington, D.C., where she will lend her considerable editing skills to our friends at *The American Prospect*.

Phoebe came to *In These Times* in 2004 as an intern and moved up the masthead to editorial assistant, assistant editor, associate editor and, most recently, managing editor. She is now 26.

Phoebe (who has enjoyed more titles than anyone in the magazine's history) served as *In These Times'* 12th managing editor in 30 years. She follows in the esteemed footsteps of Doyle Niemann, Florence Hamlish Levinsohn, Lee Aiken, Sheryl Larson, Miles Harvey, Chris Lehmann, Jim McNeill, Deidre McFadyen, myself, Craig Aaron and Jessica Clark.

She has left her mark. She will be missed.
Phoebe, we wish you the best.



Joel Bleifuss
Editor & Publisher

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REMEMBER IN THESE TIMES IN YOUR WILL.

For more information call Anna Grace Schneider at 773-772-0100 x 242 or e-mail her at: anna@inthesetimes.com.



STEVE ELLNER has taught economic history at the Universidad de Oriente in Puerto la Cruz since 1977. He co-edited *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez and the decline of an "Exceptional Democracy"*, published by Rowman

and Littlefield in 2007. He is the author of *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics: Class, Conflict and the Chávez Phenomenon*, which will be released by Lynne Rienner Publishers in 2008.



LEWIS M. STEEL is a civil rights lawyer with Outten & Golden LLP in New York. In 1968, when he was an associate counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, he wrote a *New York Times*

Magazine article about the Supreme Court titled "Nine Men in Black Who Think White."

ANNE ELIZABETH Moore co-edited *Punk Planet* in Chicago. Her next book, *Unmarketable: Brandalism, Copyfighting, Mocketing, and the Erosion of Integrity* (The New Press), chronicles the hilarious but troubling landscape created when the corporate world usurps autonomous production. Look for it in November.



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how to reach us

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Palestinian refugees arrive in Syria from Iraq at the al-Tanf border crossing on May 9, 2006.

LOUAI BESHARA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Palestinians in Iraq Face a Second Exile

BY ROBERT S. ESHELMAN

WITHIN THE NARROW STRIP of no man's land separating Iraq and Syria, nearly 400 Palestinian refugees have been forced into an impossible existence at the al-Tanf refugee camp. Aid organizations periodically deliver water, pre-cooked meals and meager supplies of medicine to the marooned inhabitants. Tents are their only protection from the sandstorms and the intense desert sun.

The situation of these Palestinians, who fled violence against them in Iraq, where they had lived for decades, is another consequence of the U.S. occupation and the bitter civil war gripping much of central Iraq. Worse, they are now refugees twice over. They can neither return to Iraq nor their own homes, for they have no nation to return to.

"What is happening there is one of the greatest tragedies brought about by the Iraq war," says Kristele Younes of Refugees International, a Washington, D.C.-based organization advocating on behalf

of displaced people around the world.

Um Rafat arrived at al-Tanf a year ago. "I was threatened by [Shi'a] militias, who said that one of my sons would be killed or kidnapped unless we left," she says. "I left with my two daughters and one of my sons and left behind my husband and my older son." The two men have since fled the family's Baghdad home, she says, and are now living elsewhere.

Iraq has long hosted displaced Palestinians, who first settled there following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Subsequent groups arrived after the Six Day War in 1967 and the Gulf War of 1991, when Yasser Arafat's support for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait triggered anti-Palestinian sentiments in the Gulf. Over the years, others settled in Iraq seeking work. By 2003, the Palestinian population was an estimated 34,000.

Not all Iraqis accepted the refugees and Saddam Hussein's past policies helped to foment animosity toward the Palestinians. By providing the refugees financial support, Hussein sought to boost his pan-

Arab credentials, but it also kindled acrimony among some Iraqis, especially after U.N. sanctions crippled Iraq's economy.

With Hussein's ouster and the outbreak of full-throated sectarianism following the February 2006 bombing of Samarra's al-Askariyya shrine, Palestinians have increasingly become targets for killings and kidnappings. According to a September 2006 Human Rights Watch report, in March 2006, militants distributed flyers in Palestinian neighborhoods of Baghdad calling them "*taqfiris*," or unbelievers, "Wahhabis, and usurpers" and warned them to leave or be "eliminated." The report profiles numerous threatened and terrified Palestinians, whose numbers have since dwindled to an estimated 15,000 in Iraq.

As Palestinians such as Um Rafat and her family flee, they encounter closed borders, with few exceptions. Israel will not allow them to return to the West Bank or Gaza, much less settle within its own borders; Jordan and Syria argue that they each have a massive Palestinian refugee population already. Few governments outside the region have offered assistance.

So they remain at al-Tanf. "It is unbearable," says Um Rafat. "The sandstorms are very hard for us. But if we close the door of the tent it will be very hot; if we open the door, it will be dusty inside. If we leave the tent we will have to face the burning sun."

The climate isn't the only factor making life hard at the camp. "We are having health problems," says Abu Alaa, spokesperson for al-Tanf's coordinating committee. "Some people have hypertension because of kidney problems. Some are having digestive problems because of the pre-cooked meals. And some are having eye problems from the dust storms." Furthermore, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there have been five miscarriages at the camp since it opened in May 2006, and two women, one pregnant at the time, have attempted suicide. "Nothing in life has prepared them for this," says Sybella Wilkes, regional spokesperson for the UNHCR. "The conditions there are totally unacceptable for extended human habitation."

Near al-Tanf, on the Iraqi side of the border, Palestinians are gathering at another camp called al-Waleed, now home

to more than 1,000 refugees. They endure the same harsh conditions as those at al-Tanf but are without much of the outside aid and face threats by Iraqi militias. "Al-Tanf—nobody should be living there," says Wilkes. "At al-Waleed, it is 10 times worse; it's the most inhumane environment."

"The lack of political will on the part of the international community is equally outrageous," says Younes. "The only solution for these people is resettlement."

But the crucial question—where—remains unanswered.

During a recent survey of the refugee situation in Jordan and Syria, Craig Johnstone, deputy head of UNHCR, told IRIN news service: "We are in touch with a couple of countries where we have some hope, but we don't have a 'yes' yet."

Meanwhile, as the numbers at al-Waleed continue to grow, Um Rafat and other Palestinians at al-Tanf wait out the summer heat and dust, which will soon give way to rain and certain floods. ■

ROBERT S. ESHELMAN is a freelance journalist whose work has appeared in the San Francisco Bay Guardian, the Nation, and the Brooklyn Rail, among other publications.

Restoring Classroom Justice

WHEN THE CHICAGO School Board passed a Student Code of Conduct on June 27 that made "restorative justice" a central approach to school discipline, a coalition of Chicago students, parents and educators celebrated a step forward in a four-year-long organizing campaign.

"Young people were being expelled and arrested for everything from throwing a pencil in class to pushing a teacher," says Yusufu Mosley, an organizer for the prison-abolition group Critical Resistance. Restorative justice programs focus on using community networks and dialogue to reconcile the offender to the community. "It's about trying to find resolution rather than being punitive," says Mosley.

The growing movement for restorative justice in schools is partially a response to "zero tolerance" policies that require students to be suspended or expelled for certain violations. Such policies grew popular after the 1999 Columbine massacre, despite multiple studies that show violence

in schools decreased between 1992 and 2004. Zero tolerance, say critics, comes down hardest on black and Latino youth.

"Students in some schools complain that if there's a fight, the first thing teachers do is call the police," says Martine Caverl, an organizer at Blocks Together, a Chicago community organization that worked on the campaign. Caverl says it is important to find conflict resolution options that circumvent the criminal justice system. "It's about a shift from seeing students as criminals to seeing them as people who have to be engaged."

Parent activists in Chicago call the draconian discipline trend "schoolhouse-to-jailhouse tracking." A study released in 2005 by the Advancement Project found that in 2003, more than 8,000 students were arrested in Chicago public schools, including four 7-year-olds. Black students constituted 50 percent of the student body, but more than 77 percent of arrests, and the city spent \$53 million on armed guards and metal detectors, which are now installed in every school.

A group called Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew—Policy Action Council (POWER-PAC) formed in

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WATCHDOGGING DISASTER

While working for the Red Cross in Mississippi during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Ben Smilowitz experienced firsthand the holes in the U.S. disaster relief system. "We had people waiting in lines for hours in the hot sun with no tents for shade and not enough water," he says, "There were women holding babies, a couple women even gave birth waiting for checks."

But Smilowitz says that when he "went public with [their] needs," his job was threatened. "I was told if I talked to the media again, I would get fired. And I did."

That's why Smilowitz, a second-year law student at the University of Connecticut, created the Disaster Accountability Project, which launched on August 8. The project has collected hundreds of policy recommendations in response to the Katrina debacle from agencies ranging from the Government Accountability Office to disability and housing advocacy groups. On the website, www.disasteraccountability.org, individuals can see what recommendations have actually been carried out. The website provides a toll-free number that individuals can call to report gaps in disaster relief responses and services. The project will then report the problems to local and national media.

"Our system's broken, public confidence is at an all-time low after Katrina, and the government is spending millions on preparedness," says Smilowitz. "The public needs to know where we stand and who's doing their jobs and who's not."

—Chelsea Ross



2003 and began lobbying the city's board of education to eliminate zero tolerance, reinstitute recess (which most Chicago public schools have cut in recent years), and reduce suspensions and arrests.

Two years later, POWER-PAC created the Austin Peace Center at Brunson Elementary School on the city's west side. The center allows students faced with suspensions to speak with an adult "peacemaker" or attend an after-school program twice a week where they receive personal attention from parent volunteers and participate in "talking circles" with other youth.

Lynn Morton, mother of a 12-year-old student and co-chair of POWER-PAC, says the Austin Peace Center creates disciplinary alternatives that involve parents and teachers. "We have students who started out in the office in trouble, five days a week," Morton says. "They went from five days a week to no days a week. When students start to get to know each other, they are less likely to hurt each other."

POWER-PAC and their allies succeeded in eliminating zero tolerance from Chicago Public Schools in 2006, and this year's new Student Code of Conduct lists community service, mediation and peer juries as alternatives to suspension and arrest. However, the district has not yet allocated funding for these initiatives, so the burden will remain on nonprofit organizations and parent volunteers.

Restorative justice has a proven track record. A 2001 study by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning found that restorative justice programs in Minnesota successfully decreased the number of out-of-school suspensions, in some schools by 50 percent. Morton visited Minneapolis in 2005 with a group of parents to observe its program. "I was kind of shocked," she says. "I walked into this building, I didn't see any metal detectors and I didn't see a security guard. The kids, when they had a difference, they asked for a talking circle."

Nationally, Madison, Wis., Los Angeles and Boston have restorative justice programs in elementary and high schools. And community organizations are pushing for programs in community centers, penal systems and even public housing.

"Restorative justice gives people the means to control their own destinies," says Mosley. "We are all relatives, and we can respond to each other as relatives, not enemies."

—Lewis Wallace



A rally in Madison, Wisc., in support of "Healthy Wisconsin."

Universal Health Care for Wisconsin?

WITH HEALTH CARE ranking near the top of voters' concerns nationally, state politicians around the country have been taking action to provide better health insurance coverage. Some states have expanded existing plans, such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), despite the Bush administration's resistance to both. Others, like Vermont, Maine and Massachusetts, have recently launched plans that combine both requiring and subsidizing insurance.

Then in late June, the Wisconsin state senate ratified "Healthy Wisconsin," a plan that is "the boldest and most comprehensive health care reform from any state," according to the Progressive States Network, which monitors state legislation. It may become a model for other states or national universal health care.

Combining features of "single-payer" proposals that make a public plan the universal insurer with elements of market-oriented "managed competition" proposals, Healthy Wisconsin would cover virtually every state resident not insured under a public program, like Medicare. According to projections by the Lewin Group, a prominent health care consulting firm, it would also save individuals, employers and governments an estimated \$13.8 billion on health insurance over the next decade.

A payroll tax of 10.5 percent on employers and 4 percent on employees collected by a new state commission would pay for the insurance. Wisconsin residents could

choose between a statewide fee-for-service plan or regional health delivery systems made up of health care providers that meet strict standards, such as offering coverage for everyone regardless of pre-existing conditions and dedicating at least 92 percent of revenue to patient care. Everyone would be guaranteed an expanded version of the coverage state employees now receive, but unions and employers could enhance the insurance by offering additions, such as adult dental insurance.

A median income household, earning about \$45,000 a year, would pay about \$750 less per year for insurance, and employers who now provide employee health insurance would on average pay 15 percent less than they do now, allowing for workers to negotiate pay increases.

"The plan combines health security and choice, single payer and competitive choices," says Robert Kraig, communications and program director for Citizen Action of Wisconsin, a leading grassroots advocate of Healthy Wisconsin. Although insurance companies could still play a role, the law "redefines how insurance companies would operate," Kraig says. "It requires provider-driven networks, put together to encourage prevention and chronic disease management. Most insurance companies would have to completely reinvent the way they do business."

The tough regulations on the provider networks helped win a compromise between single-payer advocates and proponents of managed competition, says David Riemer, director of the Wisconsin Health Project, which has advocated managed competition.

On a party-line vote, Senate Democrats included Healthy Wisconsin in the state's budget, but the Republican-dominated Assembly did not, shifting the political struggle to a conference committee. Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle, who promoted an expansion of the state Medicaid program as more realistic, has not endorsed Healthy Wisconsin. With state business groups and national conservative organizations, like Club for Growth, attacking the plan, advocates may find it difficult to find enough Republican support in the Assembly to pass the legislation.

But advocates of universal health care got this far because of a long campaign of local forums, political organizing (including the ousting of four Republican senators last year by Democrats advocating universal health care), coalition-building,

and painstaking forging of consensus of left and center. Some Republicans, including a former top aide to Tommy Thompson, the former governor and secretary of health and human services under Bush, have publicly supported the plan, as have many small business owners. In a survey by Celinda Lake taken before the plan was approved, even a majority of Wisconsin Republicans backed its features. More striking, after the same poll presented the strongest right-wing attacks on the proposal—a job-killing tax increase that would bloat government bureaucracy and attract illegal immigrants and welfare recipients to Wisconsin—67 percent of Wisconsinites surveyed still supported it.

With such strong grassroots support, advocates believe that, even if the plan doesn't pass this session, Democrats will be able to prevail next year.

"At the end of the day," Riemer says, "if it doesn't happen this year, it will happen."

—David Moberg

The Promise of Low Power FM

THE MOVEMENT to develop alternatives to mainstream corporate-owned radio got a boost recently with a bi-partisan congressional bill to expand low-power FM (LPFM), a class of frequencies devoted to non-commercial community groups. Though LPFM stations only broadcast a radius of three-and-a-half miles, they offer the chance to bring seldom-heard voices on the air.

Media activists and reform groups see LPFM as a cheap, accessible medium that counterbalances the formulaic music and news of conglomerates like Clear Channel, while offering ownership and control to underrepresented groups. A recent study by the media-policy think tank Free Press found that women own 6 percent of the country's full-power commercial radio stations; people of color and ethnic minorities control just 7.7 percent. It can cost as little as \$5,000 to launch a no-frills LPFM station. About 800 stations have been established since the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began licensing them in 2000.

The voices aired on low-power stations include evangelists, social critics, tomato pickers and indie rockers—all linked by

the credo that radio should reflect the heterogeneity of the communities it serves.

Low-power broadcasters "are only able to succeed because they are authorized by the local community," says Hannah Sassaman, an organizer with the Prometheus Radio Project, a Philadelphia-based radio advocacy group.

Prometheus has led the grassroots push for LPFM and is now building support for the Local Community Radio Act of 2007, introduced in June by Reps. Mike Doyle (D-Penn.) and Lee Terry (R-Neb.) in the House, and Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) in the Senate.

The bill would repeal strictures that have stunted LPFM's growth. In 2000, lawmakers passed rules that in effect restricted LPFM to rural areas, after industry interests alleged that their "interference" would impinge on full-power broadcasters. But new research from the FCC shows that expanding low-power



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PROMETHEUS RADIO PROJECT

Building a tower at the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement Barnraising in Greenville, S.C.

radio, even in denser markets, would not disrupt existing stations. Nonetheless, the National Association of Broadcasters recently reprised its warnings of "inevitable interference," while opposing the bill.

Media activists say LPFM not only poses no technological hazard, but serves community needs that commercial stations ignore. When Hurricane Katrina hit, low-power outlets emerged as a community-based crisis response in Texas and Mississippi, where volunteer-run stations broadcasted on-the-ground news to survivors and tracked the relief effort.

Prometheus has helped seed new LPFM

stations through “barnraisings”—collective construction projects that lay the technological groundwork for stations and train locals in media production.

One barnraising alumnus, the Florida-based Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), has used LPFM over the last four years to organize some of the country’s most vulnerable laborers. CIW broadcasts on political and labor issues to Haitian and Latin American farm workers in their own languages, and provides safety information when hurricanes hit.

“Through LPFM, our communities can have an independent voice, whose commitment is to the community itself and not to any other interests,” says CIW Co-Director Lucas Benitez. “It gives us a place to analyze the problems we face daily, and a place to look for solutions together.”

KOCZ in Opelousas, La., run by the civil-rights group Southern Development Foundation, has helped revive the area’s famed Zydeco music scene by promoting local artists and provided a dedicated forum for community news.

“If we did not have this type of media democracy, people would not have the opportunity to educate themselves and

move themselves up,” says John Freeman, one of the station’s founders. “[Full-power media] only wanted to control what these people could hear. It was a disgrace.”

With more frequencies, LPFM might finally gain ground in big cities. REACHip Hop (Representing Education, Activism and Community Through Hip Hop), a New York-based media-activist group, is partnering with Prometheus and like-minded activists to start a station centered on the city’s youth. Activist Rosa Clemente says REACHip Hop envisions the station as an outlet for politically oriented public affairs programming and as an alternative to corporate hip-hop stations.

“This is a perfect way for our generation to create our own institutions, run by our own people,” says Clemente.

Michele Gutierrez, an organizer with the Bay Area-based Youth Media Council, which focuses on media as a tool for social change, says LPFM is only the start.

“We must continue to challenge a media system controlled by the privileged few,” she says. “The power to communicate, and therefore the power to transform society, belongs to everyone.”

—Michelle Chen

No Match? No Más!

ON THE HEELS of Congress’ failure to pass an immigration reform bill, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is releasing a get-tough regulation that would force employers to either fire workers whose names and Social Security numbers don’t match or risk a fine of up to \$10,000. Corporation and labor advocates both fear it could lead to mass layoffs of immigrants.

The regulation had been sitting in the hopper for a year as Congress debated immigration. As *In These Times* went to press, DHS Spokeswoman Laura Keehner declined to say whether the regulation’s deadlines and restrictions would loosen due to hundreds of comments that business, labor and immigrant-rights groups submitted last year, decrying the rule. Laurie Reiff, co-chair of the Chamber of Commerce-sponsored Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, doesn’t expect substantial changes in the final draft. Her group will fight to delay the regulation’s start date and is

appall-o-meter

1.5 What Would Emily Post Do?

What is it about dinner guests and their annoying determination to be helpful? They insist on clearing the table, then on doing the dishes—which is to say, forcing you to do the dishes right away, as opposed to leaving you to do what you really want, which is to finish off the liquor while logging a couple hours of World of Warcraft before passing out on the couch.

Worst of all is when they take it upon themselves to put the leftovers in your basement freezer and inadvertently stumble upon the frozen remains of your murdered loved ones. That’s what happened to an unlucky dinner host in Verviers, Belgium, who happened to be keeping his wife and stepson on ice. According to the BBC, the host’s so-called friend made the discovery, thanked him for a wonderful evening, and then went home and called the Five-O. Some gratitude.

2.3 Hot Times in Johnson City

The Rev. Tommy Tester of Gospel Baptist Church in Bristol, Va., has seriously upped the ante for precherly

bad behavior. Driving through Johnson City, Tenn., recently, Tester allegedly stopped at a car wash, walked into a wash bay and began relieving himself. In full view of children. While wearing a skirt.

But Tester’s virtuoso move came moments later, when Johnson City police arrived on the scene. The 58-year-old pastor and local radio personality offered to fellate the officers. According to the *Kingsport (Tenn.) Times-News*, police found a half-empty pint of vodka and an empty bottle of oxycodone in Tester’s car.

5.7 The Oldest Defense

While Tester’s offense against public decency showed a certain panache, Florida state Rep. Bob Allen’s was just vile. Allen, Florida chair of John McCain’s campaign and a legislator with a “worst



of the worst” record on gay issues (according to a state gay rights group), was arrested in July after offering an undercover cop \$20 at a park latrine in exchange for the opportunity to polish the officer’s helmet.

“I certainly wasn’t there to have sex with anybody and certainly wasn’t there to exchange money for it,” Allen later told police in a taped statement, according to Talking Points Memo.com.

The arresting officer, he explained, “was a pretty stocky black guy, and there was nothing but other black guys around in the park.” Allen feared he “was about to be a statistic” and was just trying anything to get away.

Quotable quote (Allen, as he was being bundled into a squad car): “I don’t suppose it would help if I said I was a state legislator, would it?”

—Dave Mulcahey

considering legal challenges.

"It could fuel these document mills that help steal peoples' identities because the numbers are going to match," Reiff says. "There's the potential for major plants closing down, employers losing good employees, employees going into the underground economy—it's going to be pretty ugly."

The Social Security Administration (SSA) sent out 138,000 letters to employers last year, advising them that an employee's records were inconsistent, a situation that could arise from simple typographical error, marriage or purloined documents. In the past, many employers ignored the letters, but now receiving one could make employers liable for up to \$10,000 in fines per unauthorized worker—if the company is among the small but rising number that undergoes a government audit.

Widespread job loss often results when the government dons its immigration-enforcement blinders. In 2002, the SSA sent out 1 million notifications of mismatched information, 10 times the number sent out the previous year. Employers responded by firing 100,000 workers listed on the letters, according to an estimate by the National Immigration Law Center (NILC).

Monica Guizar, an attorney with NILC, says employers use the no-match letters as excuses to fire senior workers and bring in lower-paid substitutes. Other employers use the no-match letter to get rid of workers who have complained about working conditions, have notified government agencies of violations of labor and safety laws, or are attempting to unionize.

Housekeepers organizing at a Woodfin Suites hotel in Emeryville, Calif., learned this lesson the hard way. "When we asked the hotel to [follow the local living wage ordinance], they began to intimidate us and threatened to turn us over to the immigration authorities," says Maria Lopez, a former housekeeper. Management didn't act on the SSA letters until workers began organizing—six months after receiving notification of mismatches, says Sarah Norr, an organizer with the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy. She says employers commonly use immigration status as a weapon to attack organizing workers in the hospitality sector.

Employers complain that by forcing them to become arbiters of document authenticity, the regulation deputizes them as border guards at the workplace door, a

snapshot



Lakshmi, an Indian villager, waits to speak to Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi during her brief interaction with flood-affected villagers at a camp in Samastipur, some 100 miles north of Patna, on August 7. Floods across South Asia forced millions of people from their homes, leaving many desperate for food and drinking water. (Photo by Deshakalyan Chowdhury/AFP/Getty Images)

task made impossible by the unreliability of the methods employers have to verify workers' documents. In 2002, researchers at Temple University reviewed the government's voluntary pilot project that gives companies access to DHS and SSA databases to verify employment status. They found that the system rejected one of every five applicants with no discrepancy—including native-born citizens.

Recent reports confirm that significant errors still plague the programs that verify the employment status of new hires. A December 2006 survey conducted by the SSA's Inspector General estimated that 17.8 million files would produce the wrong result when employers attempted to check. Another 3.3 million foreign-born residents who obtained citizenship but whose Social Security file doesn't reflect the change would have to visit the agency's branch offices to resolve the error before DHS' system would give employers approval to hire them.

Grayci Rodriguez discovered how difficult it can be to clear the air when a no-match letter arrives. A Honduran native with permanent U.S. resident status and legal work authorization, Rodriguez

nonetheless was informed by her employer, the North Carolina hog butcher Smithfield Foods, that she would be fired if she didn't resolve the inconsistency. She made five trips to the office and obtained a letter from local Social Security officials confirming her authorization but was still fired.

Discrimination against job applicants who appear to be foreign rose sharply after the 1986 immigration bill, which legalized 3 million undocumented people but made it illegal for the first time to employ people who lacked work authorization.

In 1990, the General Accounting Office—as it was then known—sent testers (identical applicants with Anglo and Latino surnames) and surveyed employers on their behavior in employing immigrants. Ten percent of employers acknowledged changing their hiring and firing practices in discriminatory ways, such as refusing to hire applicants with foreign-sounding names or accents. DHS Spokeswoman Keehner says she isn't aware of any specific plans to challenge discrimination by employers as the new regulation rolls out.

—Mischa Gaus

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

How Does Laura Bush Sleep at Night?



WITH THE PASSING of Lady Bird Johnson, we are reminded that First Ladies used to stand for something. She was not as beautiful as Jackie Kennedy, and in the mid-1960s with the war in Vietnam escalating, beautifying America's highways may have seemed a trivial goal. It wasn't. Lady Bird Johnson—a successful businesswoman in her own right—combined a disdain for the spread of commercial clutter with a

love for the environment that today seems positively progressive in a first lady. She helped her husband advance the Head Start program and civil rights; she spoke publicly in support of the Equal Rights Amendment.

By contrast, what does Laura Bush stand for? Well, at first it was “literacy” and the merits of being a stay-at-home wife who gets her husband (allegedly) to quit drinking. Then she was going to combat the influence of gangs on school children. (Her husband subsequently eliminated this program.) Then there was some hand-waving about women's heart disease. Her very glitzy website also cites “Gulf Coast Rebuilding” (no comment) and “Global Diplomacy” as top Laura priorities. All of these are advanced with a smile as lock-jawed as Nurse Ratched's.

As one of the scant 15 percent of likely voters who has a “very unfavorable” assessment of Mrs. Bush (and who finds her high approval ratings a complete mystery), I would like to suggest that she may be the worst First Lady in recent memory. Here are the reasons: First, she has had no consistent program or agenda that has changed anything for the better. Second, she provides PR cover for her husband so she can pretend they're doing one thing, like helping school children, while he can do another, like screwing them and their teachers through disasters like “No Child Left Behind.” (Another example of being a beard for Bush, she promotes awareness about women's heart disease while he proposes slashes in Medicaid, 70 percent of whose recipients are poor women.) Third, she has taken absolutely no stand against her husband's relentless, Shermanesque march across women's rights. Last and most damning, she is an utter hypocrite, *especially* when it comes to global rights for women.

Remember how Laura Bush claimed that one of the main reasons for the war in Afghanistan was to liberate women from their burkas? To “kick off a world-wide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by

the al-Qaeda terrorist network and the regime it supports,” she opined in a November 2001 radio address. “The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.” Really? Seven months later, her husband withheld more than \$200 million in funding for programs to support women and to combat AIDS in Afghanistan.

And where has Laura Bush been since, when it was made clear that women would play virtually no role in the post-Taliban government? Where was she when Human Rights Watch reported in July 2003 that violence against girls and women in Afghanistan, including rape, was increasing? Well, in the spring of 2005 she went to visit Afghani women for six hours where she offered “the very best wishes of the American people.” Upon her return, she told Jay Leno things were “very encouraging” for them.

Meanwhile, this mother of two daughters has remained mute during her husband's six-and-a-half year assault on women's rights. In addition to appointing two deeply conservative, anti-choice zealots to the Supreme Court, Bush enacted

a domestic gag rule in 2004 which allowed HMOs, hospitals and the like to prohibit doctors from providing abortion referrals or even information about abortion. One of his first acts in office was to reinstate a global gag rule, which forbade any agency that got funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development from using those or any other funds (including their own!) to provide or promote abortions. Within a year, there were shortages of contraceptives, clinics had closed, and 16 developing countries (including Afghanistan, which Laura cares so much about) had seen shipments of supplies cut off.

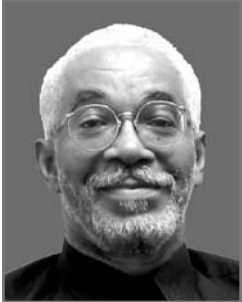
Two months after his inauguration, Bush closed the White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach. He then made sure that information about issues like pay equity and childcare were removed from the Department of Labor's website—25 such publications vanished from the Women's Bureau website alone. Instead, new bogus information, such as the claim that there was a link between having an abortion and getting breast cancer, appeared on the National Cancer Institute's website. In 2005, the Bush administration weakened the standards for compliance with Title IX (maybe the Bush girls were too busy partying to play any sports).

As one reviews this record and the cynical gaps between Mrs. Bush's pro-woman pronouncements and her husband's determination to keep as many of us as possible barefoot and pregnant, it is hard to imagine how she lives with him. Or herself. ■

Laura provides PR cover for George, pretending that they're helping children while he screws them through 'No Child Left Behind.'

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

The Counterproductive War on Gangs



WHEN IT COMES to America's criminal justice policy, the cure is often worse than the crime. Nowhere is this fact more apparent than in the war on drugs, which has inflicted more social damage than drugs themselves. So too with the war on gangs, according to a report by the Justice Policy Institute, released this July.

The conclusion of the 108-page report is evident in its title, "Gang Wars: The Failure of Enforcement Tactics and the Need for Effective Public Safety Strategies." Written by Judith Greene and Kevin Pranis, the report persuasively argues that punitive policies of policing that specifically target gangs increase rather than decrease gang violence.

"The current preoccupation with gangs is a distraction from very real problems of crime and violence that afflict too many communities," Pranis said in a press release announcing the study. "Gangs do not drive crime rates, and aggressive suppression tactics simply make the situation worse by alienating local residents and trapping youth in the criminal justice system."

More police, more prisons and more punitive measures have not stopped the cycle of gang violence, the study notes in the executive summary. The study compares gang suppression efforts in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles and found that gang problems are worse in Los Angeles and Chicago, where police employ stricter enforcement tactics. The authors conclude there is "no evidence that gang enforcement strategies achieved meaningful reduction in violence."

Los Angeles is cited as a graphic example of the failure in the war on gangs. For at least the last 20 years, the nation's second largest city has used gang injunctions, special task forces, and databases and enhanced prison sentences to specifically target gangs. But Los Angeles now has six times as many gangs as it did 20 years ago and twice the number of gang members. The authors conclude unequivocally, "Los Angeles is losing the war on gangs."

The study also reveals that Chicago's attempts to stem gang violence have had the opposite effect, noting, "a cycle of police suppression and incarceration, and a legacy of segregation, have actually helped to sustain unacceptably high levels of gang violence."

New York City employs a different strategy. Rather than trying to eliminate gangs, the city focuses on reducing gang violence. Its approach stresses community polic-

ing and gang intervention programs that provide jobs, counseling and prevention activities. Gang crimes in the nation's largest city have decreased dramatically.

The report also examined efforts in Boston, Dallas, Detroit, Indianapolis, Las Vegas, St. Louis and North Carolina. It found no evidence that increased enforcement efforts "had a positive impact on target neighborhoods."

The authors also criticize politicians who overstate the threat of gang crimes and urge tougher sentences to bolster their tough-on-crime image. Such political posturing is especially egregious, considering the perverse social effects of punitive police policies.

But pushing tough law enforcement is politically popular among constituents inundated by crime-soaked media coverage, and politicians gain little from resisting that push.

The corporate media abets punitive policing by inflaming the public's fear of crime.

One example of this furor is Chicago, where major media has been feasting on the fact that 32 school-aged children have been murdered so far this

year. A number of national news shops came to town to "investigate" what they characterized as an epidemic of youth violence. CNN's Anderson Cooper, for instance, spent a few days in the city to document and dramatize the damaging effects of this "growing culture of violence."

Predictably, most of the stories focused on "new" reasons kids are killing kids, focusing especially on the spread of gangs, the availability of guns, fractured families and a violent media culture of video games and rap music.

However, in reality, Chicago's youth are safer from murder today than at any time in at least 40 years, according to figures from the Centers for Disease Control. In 1968, there were 50 murders of youth ages 5-17 in Chicago. In 1994—the peak year of urban violence in Chicago—the number of murdered school-aged youth was 152.

Since 1995, when the total reached 115, the number of youth murders has stayed below 100. The years 2003 through 2007 have seen some of the lowest numbers in several decades. Rather than focus on this improvement, the media is awash in blood, gore and gang fears.

I make this point not to minimize the unacceptable levels of interpersonal violence that plagues the African-American and Latino communities, but to place that violence in a more realistic context. What's more, this inaccurate portrayal of new levels of violence, combined with the inordinate focus on gangs and rap, tends to demonize a youthful population already bearing the brunt of social disinvestment. ■

'Aggressive tactics make the situation worse by alienating local residents and trapping youth in the criminal justice system.'

BY H. CANDACE GORMAN

Gitmo's Last Honest Man



IN LATE JUNE, a brave whistleblower submitted a devastating affidavit to the Supreme Court, which prompted the court to reverse itself and hear the latest Guantánamo cases challenging the Military Commissions Act. Lt. Col. Stephen Abraham's affidavit exposed Guantánamo's kangaroo tribunals for the sham that they are. Luckily, the only tribunal on which Abraham sat considered the case of my client, Abdul Al-Ghizzawi.

Abraham, a California lawyer in the Army Reserves, was assigned to the Office for the Administrative Review of the Detention of Enemy Combatants (OARDEC) in 2004. He served as an inter-agency go-between, compiling information on Guantánamo's prisoners from various government offices. The information was gathered into a dossier and presented as evidence to the combatant status review tribunals, which would review the file and determine whether a prisoner should be classified as an enemy combatant.

As he became more familiar with this process, Abraham became increasingly alarmed. He found that the "evidence" was generally gathered by inexperienced staff with little legal or intelligence training. He got no assurance that he was given access to all available evidence on a detainee. Officials refused to say whether exculpatory evidence existed or was being withheld, despite government testimony before Congress and filed documents in the courts swearing that all exculpatory evidence was reviewed.

Abraham became directly involved in an enemy combatant classification when he was assigned to tribunal panel 23 in 2004. The panel determined that there was no evidence to support a finding that Al-Ghizzawi was an enemy combatant. According to Abraham:

What were purported to be specific statements of fact lacked even the most fundamental earmarks of objectively credible evidence. Statements allegedly made by percipient witnesses lacked detail. Reports presented generalized statements in indirect and passive forms without stating the source of the information or providing a basis for establishing the reliability or the credibility of the source. Statements of interrogators presented to the panel offered inferences from which we were expected to draw conclusions favoring a finding of "enemy combatant" but that, upon even limited questioning from the panel, yielded the response from the Recorder, "We'll have to get back to you."

The military claimed that Al-Ghizzawi was a member of the

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)—a boilerplate accusation leveled at all Libyan detainees. Al-Ghizzawi denied it, but even if it were true, there were no ties between the LIFG and the Taliban or al-Qaeda. LIFG was not on the State Department's watch list of possible terrorist organizations until years after Al-Ghizzawi was imprisoned at Guantánamo. Thus, members of that group were freely allowed to visit the United States while Mr. Al-Ghizzawi was imprisoned. Panel 23 was unimpressed with the accusation:

On the basis of the paucity and weakness of the information provided both during and after the CSRT hearing, we determined that there was no factual basis for concluding that the individual should be classified as an enemy combatant. Rear Admiral [James M.] McGarrah [director of OARDEC] and the Deputy Director immediately questioned the validity of our find-

ings. They directed us to write out the specific questions that we had raised concerning the evidence to allow the Recorder an opportunity to provide further responses. We were then ordered to reopen the hearing to allow the Recorder to present further argument as to why the detainee should be classified as

The difference between Abraham and the Bush White House is that Abraham has an attachment to justice and fairness.

an enemy combatant. Ultimately, in the absence of any substantive response to the questions and no basis for concluding that additional information would be forthcoming, we did not change our determination that the detainee was not properly classified as an enemy combatant. OARDEC's response to the outcome was consistent with the few other instances in which a finding of "Not an Enemy Combatant" (NEC) had been reached by CSRT boards. In each of the meetings that I attended with OARDEC leadership following a finding of NEC, the focus of inquiry on the part of the leadership was "what went wrong."

What Abraham doesn't describe in his affidavit is that his panel's determination was ultimately overruled by the higher ups and Al-Ghizzawi's matter was submitted to a second tribunal, with more compliant members. Based on no new evidence, Al-Ghizzawi was reclassified as an enemy combatant. He was never informed that his case had been submitted to a second tribunal and he never learned that he had been initially classified as a non-enemy combatant.

Lt. Col. Abraham is no bleeding-heart lefty. *The New York Times* describes him as a "political conservative who cried when Nixon resigned." The difference between Abraham and the White House is that Abraham is still attached to the quaint notion of justice. With my client's future in his hands, he and his panel members bucked pressure from their superiors and did the right thing. The scrupulous Abraham was never asked to sit on a CSRT again. Guantánamo's kangaroo justice has no use for people of principle. ■

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

The Crafting of Obama



TO MY ESTEEMED colleague, *In These Times* Senior Editor Salim Muwakkil:

I love your work, but I have to call you out on your missive in the August issue, "The Squandering of Obama."

You suggest that America's first serious black presidential candidate is running away from race. "Perhaps he came to believe that political success was incompatible with efforts to promote a serious

racial reckoning," you wrote last month. You also argue that Obama's handlers are reining him in and steering the candidate away from "a progressive revolution."

Salim, give the brother some credit.

Obviously you have never built a staircase. I'm no carpenter myself, but I know the drill. Carpentry is an art that can illuminate the task of running for president—*particularly* for one who is African American.

Webster's defines a staircase as "a means of access as from one level to another, consisting of a series of stairs with or without a balustrade." When you set out to erect a staircase, the key task is measurement. Every space must be painstakingly configured to the nth degree. The runners, risers and stair treads must all conform to a master plan.

When Barack Obama launched his presidential bid, he became a carpenter. He was forced to make a decision: Did he want to build a staircase, or merely a platform?

Historically, most African-American presidential aspirants have taken the platform route.

You don't have to be an expert on the law of gravity to know that a platform won't get you to the top.

Al Sharpton, Carol Moseley Braun and Shirley Chisholm built platforms. That is not to belittle their accomplishments. Still, a realistic assessment of their candidacies must acknowledge their aspirational aspects. They pushed valid ideas with passion, but left no real footprint in the electoral world. They neither built nor left a political organization that could elevate future messengers. The campaigns left behind only wisps of colorful smoke on a politically arid landscape.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., who took shots at the White House in 1984 and '88, was a more able and ambitious carpenter. Still, his resources were limited to his marquee name and a set of rhetorical skills that careened off the

charts. Jackson struggled to build a staircase that could accommodate a host of progressive and multi-cultural elements and lift them to new heights in power.

Jackson was a carpenter with a febrile imagination. The magic of Jackson's candidacy was his ability to broaden his focus to include groups outside his core constituency. His grand coalition of farmers, farm workers, Native Americans, day laborers, coal miners, factory hands, unionists and students was reminiscent of the days of progressives like Henry Wallace and "Fighting Bob" LaFollette.

He left behind a staircase. True, it was rickety, but one that future aspirants could consult and study.

Jackson's staircase was fashioned with soft pine and balsawood. Obama's must be hewn from oak and cherry wood.

Those elements are more difficult to work with, but

expert carpenters know they produce a structure infinitely more fecund and long-lived.

Obama started making his measurements 20 years ago, when he began building his career. A multicultural upbringing in Hawaii and Asia, on to

Harvard, the University of Chicago, stints at community and electoral organizing, and a few rounds as a policy wonky legislator. Every move was carefully calibrated to culminate in a dream resume for a presidential wannabe.

There are three basic building blocks that will propel a candidate through the front door of the 21st Century White House: money, organization and the Internet. No black presidential aspirant has ever gotten a handle on any of the three. Obama has mastered them all.

Obama hasn't squandered his progressive credentials, he has finely honed them. The candidate is calling for more strategic attention to education funding, while at the same time demanding more parental involvement. He appeals to black pride but eschews the losing prospect of posturing as the "black candidate." He condemns inequities in the American electoral system, while demanding that "Cousin Pookie" get off the sofa and vote.

His "black" agenda should include rescuing all of us from the Iraq catastrophe, ratcheting up his attacks on America's vast income disparities, and banishing corporate interests from our health care and campaign finance systems.

Salim Muwakkil and others posit that Obama's failure to challenge America's racist legacy betrays his progressive roots. Trying to dismantle the architecture of American white supremacy won't get him to the White House. If he doesn't reinforce that rickety old staircase, he'll end up with a pile of sawdust. ■

When Barack Obama launched his bid, he was forced to make a decision: Did he want to build a staircase, or merely a platform?

A Dream Deferred

Only sustained community activism will reverse the Supreme Court's most recent betrayal of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

BY LEWIS M. STEEL

ON JUNE 28, THREE years after the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court subverted *Brown*'s meaning to block public school integration plans. As a result, boards of education across the country, which have used racial criteria to reduce segregation, must undo their efforts or themselves be branded as racial discriminators. Examining the role of the courts and the role of movement activists and attorneys is essential to understanding the history of this reversal.

The 1955 *Brown* decision came after a 20-year campaign of sustained litigation that was supported by massive organizing and that was finally backed by a Justice Department brief that argued segregation could cause the country to lose its contest with the Soviet Union for the hearts and minds of the Third World. Relying on the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, which was passed after the Civil War to ensure former slaves equal rights, the Supreme Court weakened state-enforced segregation in public settings through *Brown* and a series of subsequent cases.

Despite gains made in the South after *Brown* and as a result of intense pressure from courageous civil rights activists, which led to the passage of federal laws between 1964 and 1968, desegregation fell into full retreat mode. The Court determined in 1974 that school segregation in the north was an acceptable consequence of segregated housing patterns and geopolitical boundaries.

Now, with their June 28 decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No.1*, the four justices who comprise the Court's right-wing bloc, with the concurrence of the more mainstream conservative Justice Anthony Kennedy, have taken what may be the final step in making *Brown* ob-



Outside the Supreme Court, protesters call for the preservation of *Brown*. Inside (not pictured), the Roberts Court unfreezes *Dred Scott*.

solete. The court condemned the modest attempts by the Seattle and Jefferson County (Louisville), Ky., boards of education to voluntarily reduce segregation by employing race-conscious integration plans. "Foul!" cried the Supreme Court. The same Constitution and the same *Brown* decision—which, in theory, required desegregation 53 years earlier—now required local boards of education to maintain their segregated schools, unless they could shoehorn themselves into the sliver of an opening for diversity that was provided by Kennedy's decision.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the majority, reviewed precedents from the 1955 remedy phase of the *Brown* case (known as the second *Brown* decision)—which created the insidious "all deliberate speed" formula for desegregating southern schools—through the 2003 University of Michigan cases, in which Justice Sandra Day O'Connor barely saved the consideration of race as a means to increase diversity at the uni-

versity level. According to Roberts, educating children in a racially integrated environment and ensuring non-white students' access to desirable schools was different, according to the chief justice. "Racial balancing," or seeking to remedy "past societal discrimination," was just another way of discriminating on the basis of race. To Justice Clarence Thomas, concurring with Roberts, arguments in favor of integration were "faddish social theories." In his dissent, Justice Stephen Breyer demonstrated that the difference between what Roberts said was societally caused (*de facto*) segregation in Seattle and Louisville and what Roberts said was governmentally caused (*de jure*) segregation was not clear. Elements of governmentally caused and societal segregation are invariably mixed. In any event, Breyer argued this distinction only had meaning with regard to whether segregation violated the Constitution, not whether boards of education could voluntarily integrate their schools.

Judge Kennedy's concurrence tried to slip in between the dueling justices. A compelling interest to avoid racial isolation and to achieve integration to create equal opportunity does exist, he wrote. And school administrators should continue "the important work of bringing together students of different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds." But, he warned, they should not resort to racial classifications, and should consider instead such devices as magnet schools and enriched academic programs. Straddling the two four-justice camps, Kennedy's opinion becomes the controlling voice. To the dissenters and the civil rights legal community, however, Kennedy did little more than invite another round of endless litigation.

This tortured outcome raises a more important question than whether a few public school boards may introduce a drop of integration into a sea of segregation. Put simply, do the Court's negative decisions matter that much any more? Present-day racial discrimination and segregation are still beyond the reach (or at least the will) of the law, leaving millions subjected to the same disadvantages and indignities that existed before the civil rights movement. Life expectancy, imprisonment and unemployment rates as well as educational levels all attest to the racial disparities. Traffic stops for "driving while black" remain a commonplace experience, especially in white neighborhoods. Differing penalties and enforcement of drug laws have turned the prisons into racial holding pens and have eliminated the right to vote for a significant percentage of the black population. The death penalty is disproportionately imposed on people of color. Employers who reject job applicants with "black names" do so with impunity. The real estate industry continues its dodges to separate blacks from whites. Municipalities place subsidized housing and environmentally hazardous projects in neighborhoods of color, while underfunding their public schools, parks and other publicly supported facilities.

Ever since 1955, when the Court's second *Brown* decision negated the first ruling's focus on equal educational opportunities, the Court has, with rare exceptions, slowly but surely ignored or openly turned against meaningful enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment. In response, Robert L. Carter, a key theoretician in the *Brown* case as well as the leader of the legal effort to dismantle northern school

segregation, criticized the Court for failing to confront racial isolation. Thurgood Marshall, after becoming a Supreme Court justice, lambasted the majorities in the '70s cases that blocked the desegregation of Detroit's schools and that allowed Texas to retain a financing system that severely underfunded poor, mostly Latino and black schools. More recently, the renowned NYU law professor and criti-

and has "never wavered," the justices have coddled segregationists and given short shrift to meaningful concepts of equality.

Without the force of powerful constituencies giving urgency to their arguments, civil rights lawyers' pleas for equality do little more than stir the creative juices of those who use their legal skills to make a mockery of that concept. Judges can always find a justification to leave things the

Racial discrimination and segregation are still beyond the reach of the law, leaving millions subjected to the same disadvantages that existed before the civil rights movement.

cal race theorist Derrick Bell has argued that black Americans would have been far better off if the Supreme Court had stuck with its 1896 "separate but equal" doctrine and, instead of decrying school segregation in 1954, meaningfully enforced the "but equal" portion of that ruling. According to Bell, black communities then could have continued to build their infrastructures and fought their way to equality.

Knowing the Court's equivocations, I am convinced it would not have enforced equal funding for black communities. But Bell's point is that almost anything would have been better than the Court's substitute for equality. Contrary to its original intent, which conservative justices supposedly venerate, the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause has been turned against black Americans. It has become whites' ticket into federal court, successfully used by them to challenge school desegregation, oppose affirmative action in awarding public contracts and limit minority access to public employment. Even when Justice O'Connor cast the tie-breaking vote in the 2003 Michigan Law School case, she called its plan, which at best was an attempt to level the playing field, a form of discrimination that perhaps could be tolerated for only another 25 years.

What the Supreme Court has now done is merely extend the obstacles it has placed in the path to equal opportunities. From a longer historical perspective, one could say that since the *Dred Scott* decision before the Civil War, a series of court rulings have time and again thwarted the struggle for equal rights. Contrary to the June 29 *New York Times* editorial that echoed the myth that the Supreme Court since *Brown* has been "the driving force for integration"

way they are or turn back the clock. And even when judges occasionally seek to alter the landscape, they are prone to ignoring their own pronouncements.

Two years ago, I was a speaker at an Ohio State University Law School symposium concerning post-*Brown* judicial struggles. People from the Columbus community expressed their anger at the Ohio Supreme Court for not enforcing its own decision requiring equal public school funding under the state constitution. Three times, the court had failed to enforce its own decree, one man complained bitterly. "What are you lawyers going to do about it?" he asked. "This is the state capital, isn't it?" I replied. "Both the court and the legislature sit here. Have you organized protests? What have you done?" The answer, as far as I could tell, was very little.

Progressive forces still need civil rights lawyers to protect activists, help expose injustices and move the law along when communities demand change and are organized to fight for it. Even this most repressive Supreme Court decision, with the Kennedy concurrence and the Breyer dissent, contains the possible seeds of a more progressive future for public education. Well-funded magnet schools and enriched academic programs can serve the needs of black as well as white school children. But without sustained activism, this latest Supreme Court decision will stand as a monument to the right-wing takeover of even the verbiage of equality.

The justices have eyes and ears, as do those who appoint and confirm them. Whether the Kennedy concurrence can be used as a wedge to open doors or will become just another weak and forgotten voice depends upon the people who have a stake in the outcome, which is all of us. ■

Farming the Concrete Jungle

In cities across the country urban farmers are growing communities, greening the landscape and revolutionizing food politics

BY PHOEBE CONNELLY AND CHELSEA ROSS

At 9 a.m. on a cool, bright Saturday in mid-June, Robert Burns and Diana Baldelomar set up a farm stand outside the YMCA in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood. The stand is simple: a tent to keep out the sun, two folding tables set in an L-shape and a handful of zinc washtubs filled with two inches of water. In the tubs stand heads of green and red lettuce, greens, broccoli, and bunches of mint and basil.

When two women approach and ask the price of the greens, Baldelomar tells them that the turnip, mustard and collard greens are a dollar a bunch. "Honney," the woman says, "in this neighborhood, if someone asks you for greens, they are only talking about the collards." Her companion asks, "Did you ship it in from the country?"

"No ma'am. These are from right around the corner, West Cottage and Brook. We went out and harvested them this morning. You should stop by sometime."

Burns and Baldelomar work with the Food Project, a community-based urban agriculture program founded in 1991 to get Boston's youth involved in food production. Their West Cottage plot is one of four farms on vacant lots in the Dorchester neighborhood.

The Food Project is part of a growing urban agriculture movement to improve access to quality food in cities by creating local sources of fresh produce. The movement is showing that sustainable, local food systems are not only a way to ensure food security but also a means of addressing social justice issues.

And the movement is getting stronger. Community urban agriculture programs are gaining support from city governments desperate to increase green space and capitalize on public interest in environmental responsibility. As *In These Times* went to press, the 2007 farm bill had passed in the House of Representatives with a \$30 million appropriation for community food projects.

"The biggest crisis in our food system is the lack of access to good, healthy, fresh food, for people living in cities, particularly in low-income communities," says Anna Lappé, co-founder with her mother Frances Moore Lappé of the Small Planet Institute. "Urban agriculture work is one of the most powerful solutions, because it brings food directly into the communities."

Not just another garden

In her book, *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening In America*, Laura Lawson charts a movement that stretches back to the 1880s. Lawson, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, says that urban garden-

ing programs have had three missions: bringing nature to the city, offering educational opportunities to low-income and immigrant children, and cultivating a self-help ethos in a democratic space. "The garden itself," she writes, "is rarely the end goal but rather facilitates agendas that reach beyond the scope of gardening."

The Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), a food policy organization with more than 200 member groups, defines urban agriculture as "the growing, processing, and distribution of food and other products through intensive plant cultivation and animal husbandry in and around cities." It divides urban agriculture into commercial farms, community gardens and backyard gardens. But programs like Boston's Food Project have begun to collapse such distinctions. They run commercial farms, but they also invest in their communities and create local supply networks.

According to the 2000 Census, 80 percent of the U.S. population lives in cities or suburbs. Food travels 25 percent farther than it did in 1980, and fruits and vegetables spend up to 14 days in transit. The CFSC notes, "Most fruit and vegetable varieties sold in supermarkets are chosen for their ability to withstand industrial harvesting equipment and extended travel, not for their taste or nutritional quality."

The Food Project began on Ward Cheney's farm in Lincoln, Mass., about 24 miles west of Boston, with the goal of strengthening young people's connection to the land. They started by busing city kids out to the country, but the group now farms five urban plots—a total of 2.5 acres. Each summer the Food Project



employs 60 kids to work on both the urban and rural farms. After the summer, the youth can return as interns to learn how to run the project's farmers' markets and commercial kitchen.

In the Midwest, Growing Power runs three farms in Chicago, youth employment and education programs and a world famous vermiculture (worm compost) project.

In Oakland, Calif., People's Grocery operates five urban gardens in the largely black and Latino communities of West and North Oakland, as well as a youth nutrition program staffed by young people.

In Brooklyn, Added Value has turned an old asphalt baseball diamond into a full-functioning farm. And in Philadelphia, Mill Creek Farm is using storm runoff to irrigate its urban farm. Indeed, community agriculture projects are sprouting up in cities across the country—in San Francisco (Alemany Farm), Albany (Massachusetts Ave. Project), Birmingham, Ala. (Jones Valley Urban

Farm), and Houston (Urban Harvest). According to the USDA, the number of farmers' markets has grown by 50 percent since 1994, and the federal Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program is funding more than twice as many groups as it did a decade ago.

Beyond organic

The organic food movement is rapidly changing how America eats and grows its food. Between 1997 and 2001, farmers added a million acres of certified organic land, doubling the amount of organic pasture and more than doubling organic cropland. This reflects not just a rise of specialty retailers like Whole Foods. By 2003 organic products could be found in 73 percent of conventional grocery stores according to a USDA study, and last summer, the retail giant Wal-Mart began selling organics. But Erika Allen, development director of Growing Power, says the organic label doesn't tell the whole story. "There are organic farmers on the walls of Whole Foods who have some atrocious labor practices—atrocious. They're just like plantation owners. People don't know that."

Moreover, organic food is still largely

inaccessible to low-income communities and communities of color. And the costs associated with being certified organic have led many urban agriculture programs to shy away from being certified. "We are what most folks would consider organic, but we're not certified," the Food Project's Burns says. "That's not as important to us. We're in the community; folks can just come by and see our practices. It's about transparency."

Accessibility is at the heart of what these groups call food security. "It's about everyone having access to culturally appropriate and nutritional food at all times," says Danielle Andrews, who heads up farming for Food Project's Dorchester plots.

"We're using food to make social connections," says Growing Power's Allen. "It's not just about growing food—it's about practices and how people form relationships, get comfortable with each other and learn to communicate through really owning the food system."

Forming such sustainable relationships inherently requires addressing issues of privilege. Growing Power manages a farm on the edge of Cabrini Green, Chicago's most notorious housing project. The site

Photos clockwise from the top left: Alemany Farm, San Francisco; Growing Power, Chicago; Growing Power, Chicago; People's Grocery, Oakland



is owned by Fourth Presbyterian Church, the wealthiest congregations in the city. “The work that we’re doing is social justice work,” says Allen, who is bi-racial. “For white folks to support and ally with people of color and communities that are struggling, they have to understand that it’s not just about knowing how to grow lettuce. It’s important that people doing these projects are very transparent about why they’re there.”

Oases in the food desert

In West Oakland, home to City Slickers and People’s Grocery, liquor stores outnumber grocery stores 40 to one. The most readily available food is fried. On the other side of the country, in Added Value’s Brooklyn neighborhood, the last grocery store shut its doors in 2001. Federal studies classify such communities as “food insecure,” but they are popularly known as “food deserts.” A study in the June 2001 *Journal of Nutrition* found that women living in “food insecure” areas were more likely to be overweight and thus at risk for obesity-related illnesses like diabetes and heart disease.

To counter the harm caused by food deserts, urban agriculture focuses on high-density food production—optimizing the amount of food grown on the least amount of land. City Slicker grew 6,500 pounds of produce last year

on less than one acre of land. “If the average person eats three to four hundred pounds of produce per year, that doesn’t feed that many people,” says City Slicker’s Rosenthal. “But I’m not saying it’s insignificant, because those couple dozen people improved their diet.”

These projects also help people sustain themselves. Both City Slicker and Food Project run backyard gardening programs that provide lead testing to determine the safety of soil, wooden planters, seeds, seedlings and ongoing assistance for the life of the garden.

“Our backyard garden program fits with the idea that the human resources are here, what’s lacking are the materials,” says Willow Rosenthal, founder of City Slicker. “There are folks coming to us in their 20s and 40s saying, ‘I really want to know how to do this. I remember farming when I was five with my grandmother.’”

Since the program’s inception in 2005, City Slicker has helped build 50 backyard gardens and has set a goal of 50 per year in the future. “We’re building a whole community of urban gardeners,” says Rosenthal.

Two years ago, City Slicker helped Shirley Chunn start a garden. What started as two boxes has now taken over her yard. “It’s really nice to just go out and relax in the morning and see all my vegetables,” says Chunn. Four of her neighbors now have City Slicker gardens.

According to City Slicker, 40 percent of the 2006 participants were able to grow

half or more of their household’s produce, 30 percent experienced a positive change in their health, and 50 percent added more fresh vegetables to their diet. City Slicker also buys excess produce from these backyard gardens at a premium organic rate, which it then sells at a lower price at its community farm stand.

The economics—whether through production or backyard programs—are not insignificant. In its primer on urban agriculture the CFSC writes, “Maintaining regional and local farm-to-consumer enterprises helps keep the entire industry accountable for the food system, increasing the likelihood that food is produced and consumed in sustainable ways.” The CFSC cites the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association which estimates that if every family in Maine spent \$10 a week on local food, \$104 million would be kept in the local economy.

Cultivating leaders

Four years ago, Geralina Fortier, then 17, got involved with People’s Grocery to fulfill a high school community service requirement. Today, Fortier coordinates People’s youth nutrition programs. “We believe that youth are the best agents for change, especially to one another, so we create workshops and presentations about eating healthy,” says Fortier, as she shovels compost onto a new bed at People’s 55th Street garden in West Oakland.

Now a college student majoring in community and health education, Fortier says her work with People’s Grocery has changed her life. Asked what she would be doing if she hadn’t gotten involved with People’s Grocery, she replies, “I’d be fat.”

“I’m pretty radical about my diet,” says Fortier, “A lot of my friends thought I was crazy and still do.” After three years as a strict vegan, she recently switched to a raw food diet because “that’s how we should be eating anyway.”

At Brooklyn’s Added Value, the conversation about nutrition starts in grade school. Almost every child in the local school district has visited the farm at least once through its “Farm to School” pro-

Photos clockwise from the top left: City Slicker Farm, Oakland; People’s Grocery, Oakland; Growing Power, Chicago; Photos taken by Chelsea Ross

gram. Added Value also runs a youth program that teaches high school kids food production and sales, media literacy, sustainable business development and community education and organizing.

"We're not growing farmers, we're trying to grow young people who are inspired by the world around them and who care and see themselves as empowered to take action in fixing things," says Caroline Loomis, Added Value's community education coordinator.

Greening the concrete jungle

Loomis sees urban agriculture as a way to transform the meaning of urban green space. "Can you imagine what our cities would like if every park had a farm built into it?" she asks.

Three years ago, the Boston Area Health Education Center asked the Food Project to farm raised flowerbeds on the roof of Boston Medical Center's parking garage. The Food Project hauled 50 crates of compost to the roof in shopping carts and started with a crop of tomatoes, summer squash and eggplant. Andrews says that neighborhood people have "come over really excited about this lot. The roof is pretty ugly. Even with the vegetables, it's still pretty ugly. But it's a great improvement from what was here."

Increased green space also has a measurable effect on crime. University of Illinois researchers found that housing projects with trees have a 7 percent lower crime rate than their treeless counterparts. They also found that the greener the environment the lower the level of domestic violence.

The recognition that the urban landscape needs green space has opened doors to city partnerships. The asphalt lot that Added Value farms is owned by New York City, and the Brooklyn Zoo supplies compost. In Chicago, Growing Power has partnered with the Chicago Park District to operate two quarter-acre model urban farms, one next to Michigan Avenue in downtown Grant Park and the other in Jackson Park on the South Side.

But Rosenthal says that expanding these relationships is not enough. "What we really need to do is to start working with the city governments and the county governments and the state, and hopefully with the federal level, to create programs that actually support doing productive urban agriculture on a scale that would

be meaningful," she says. "And that really means addressing the farm bill."

A food, not farm bill

Andy Fisher is one of the founders of the CFSC, which formed in 1994 to lobby for changes in the 1996 bill. For Fisher and others wanting to transform food access and production in the United States, changing

on consumption patterns. In 2006, 26.7 million Americans received food stamps.

The version of the farm bill passed in the House this summer has expanded funding to encourage food stamp recipients to shop at farmers' markets: \$32 million is allocated to the renamed Farmers' Market Promotion Program; also the bill expands both who is eligible to sell at

'We're not growing farmers, we're trying to grow young people who are inspired by the world around them and who see themselves as empowered to take action.'

what the government funds in the farm bill is crucial. "You've got a structure of commodity programs subsidizing—corn, dairy and meat—to the exclusion of other crops," says Fisher. "Take the food pyramid: The farm bill subsidizes the exact opposite of that: 72 percent of all farm subsidies are going into dairy and meat production and smaller amounts into grains for human consumption. The only fruits or vegetables subsidized are apples. So there is a real impact on people's diets. In a very broad sense the farm bill is a food bill, and should be thought of that way."

In addition to subsidizing Big Ag, the farm bill allocates funds for the food stamp program, which, as the nation's largest nutrition program, has a significant impact

markets, and the availability of Electronic Benefit Transfer technology to process food stamps as payment. A 2004 UCLA study by researchers at the School of Public Health found that offering those receiving government food assistance (in this case, the Women, Infants and Children program) access to farmers' markets resulted in increased fruit and vegetable consumption that continued beyond the offered incentive.

The House version of the farm bill also allocates \$30 million over the next five years to the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program, which, since its inception in 1996, has funded 240 programs to help low-income communities meet their nutritional needs.

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(The Food Project and Growing Power have received three grants each.) Stephanie Larsen, policy organizer with the CFSC cautions however that in the 2007 bill CFP funds were changed from mandatory (that is, guaranteed at that level each year) to discretionary (subject to the annual budget approval). “Due to the nature of the appropriations process, there is always a significant possibility that CFP will get much less than \$30 million a year and we would have to fight for it annually against all other programs.”

It remains to be seen what will happen in the Senate, but legislators are starting to realize the importance of urban agriculture funding. “I rise today to express my support for the [farm bill] ... but also to express my concern about the lack of funding for community food projects,” said Rep. Rush Holt (D-N.J.) on the House floor.

Owning what you till

The 2007 farm bill may help urban agriculture, but larger questions about sustainability remain. “No one is against gardening,” says UIC’s Lawson, “but not everyone wants to fund it.”

The massive federal subsidies received

by Big Ag companies help keep food prices artificially low. That means small-scale, sustainable agriculture must self-subsidize its prices to compete in the marketplace. And as the profile of urban agriculture rises, urban farms are also confronting questions about whether to participate in the high-priced, organic farmers’ markets cropping up around the country.

“It’s important to us that the food we

forming that space, that earth,” she says. “Once you have that tillable soil, it’s there for whatever programs want to come along and claim it. The gardeners need to look at land use and ownership of sites, and work with the city to keep them permanent.”

Many hold up Philadelphia as the gold standard of land stewardship. Founded in 1986, the Neighborhood Gardens As-

The massive federal subsidies received by Big Ag companies help keep food costs artificially low, which means small-scale agriculture must self-subsidize its prices to compete.

grow here is available to people in the community,” says the Food Project’s Andrews. “That means it’s not sold at the prices it would be if it was sold downtown.” Selling at high-end markets is an issue that the Food Project grapples with because it has the potential to allow the organization to sustain itself. Right now, the group makes around \$20,000 off the produce grown on its Dorchester land. If the Food Project sold it at the Copley Square farmers’ market, opposite the Neiman Marcus, Andrews estimates they could get twice as much. “I think there is a sense at the organization that it could lend something to the urban agriculture movement if we were economically sustainable.”

So far, however, the Food Project is opting out. “Our community is patient with what goes along with urban agriculture. Sometimes our compost smells, or we’ll have a little rat infestation,” Andrews says. “If we were selling downtown, it could become uncomfortable. I don’t think it would make a whole lot of sense.”

Because of funding difficulties, over the years many community food projects have died, which hurts those communities that have come to rely on their resources.

“Everyone keeps reinventing this thing over and over again, which tells me it has a really important function, and it should be supported,” says Lawson. “But we shouldn’t have to keep finding new land and new leaders.”

For this reason, Lawson stresses land ownership as one path to sustainability. “The exact audience will change over time—but the hardest thing is trans-

sociation (NGA) is a community land trust that holds land reclaimed by gardeners in order to save it from development when property values rise. (One of the quandaries urban agriculture programs face is that when they transform previous “worthless” land, they simultaneously raise its property value and that of the surrounding area.) The NGA currently holds 24 plots in trust. In Chicago, a similar program called NeighborSpace has been around since 1996. Both programs focus on community gardens, but the overall aim of creating community land is one that resonates with everyone working in urban agriculture. “If you have control over the land and the water, if you can feed yourself, you can really transform society,” says Erika Allen. “But these communities don’t have any of those things, so how can you have a just society?”

For urban agriculturists it all comes back to empowering and investing in community. “[W]e expect to see more people of all ages and backgrounds first becoming educated food consumers, and then becoming engaged food citizens,” concludes the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program 10 year progress report. “As healthful food and healthy eating become the norm, we anticipate that more people will look for broader regional and policy-based answers to the problems that continue to beset their communities.”

But for Allen and her colleagues, food is not only an end, it’s the means. “We’re working towards a just world where everyone has full bellies and land and water,” she says. “We’re using food as a tool to get there. And it’s completely doable.” ■



BY STEVE ELLNER

THE TRIAL (AND ERRORS) OF HUGO CHÁVEZ

CARACAS—IN APRIL 2006, AFTER a failed attempt to demolish the structurally unsafe bridge on the highway connecting Caracas with the Port of La Guaira, the Chávez opposition expressed outrage at government incompetence. Manuel Rosales, the opposition candidate in the December 2006 presidential elections, accused President Hugo Chávez of “allowing the Caracas-La Guaira bridge to collapse” and “having inaugurated scores of public works projects without completing them.”

However, on June 21, 2007, President Chávez inaugurated a new bridge that is 180 feet high and half a mile long—longer than the original one. The construction was on schedule and in time for the kickoff of the America Soccer Cup. In a jab at the opposition, the main state-controlled TV channel declared, “You can’t cover up the accomplishment with a finger.” In another plus for Chávez, nine modern, well-designed stadiums were constructed or remodeled for the games, which Venezuela hosted for the first time in the Cup’s 90-year history.

Although the government won this round, the issues raised by the opposition resist easy answers. Oil prices are at record highs. And the nationalist Chávez has driven a hard bargain with the oil companies. They now pay 33 per-

cent in royalties for the massive deposits of the Orinoco River region, up from 1 percent paid during the neoliberal years of the ’90s. Chávez not only counts on increased oil income to finance his experimental programs, but vigorous enforcement of the income tax system.

But Venezuelans are debating whether Chávez is putting this windfall revenue to good use or squandering it through disorganization, corruption and misplaced priorities.

The debate over government performance is significant because much of the country’s oil wealth is being invested in novel social programs to help the poor. Indeed, Chávez calls the model he aspires to create “21st century socialism,” which stresses solidarity and democracy from below and prioritizes social over economic goals.

In some ways, the current debate over government programs replays a conflict Venezuela faced during the oil boom of the ’70s. Neoliberals have bashed the ’70s and particularly the first government of Carlos Andrés Pérez for using the increased revenue to expand the role of the state in the economy without producing concrete results. Stanford political science professor Terry Karl refers to the experience of the ’70s as the “Paradox of Plenty.” Rather than foment development, she says the spike in oil revenue led to greater handouts, aggravating both dependence on the state and a climate of paternalism. Ironically, Pérez,



Supporters of Chávez cross the Caracas-La Guaira bridge, just after its inauguration on June 21, 2007.

PEDRO REY/AP/GETTY IMAGES

who nationalized the oil and iron industries during those years, returned to power in 1989 to impose neoliberal formulas that were a fiasco and resulted in his ouster.

In the case of Chávez, both sides have overstated their case in regard to government spending. The Chávez government has made mistakes in administering social programs that cost huge sums and involved many people. Nevertheless, the programs that are working have begun to transform

of fishermen, for challenging the control of monopoly companies.

One of the few large cooperatives is the Fabricio Ojeda, which consists of the 150 workers (all but one of whom are women) at the Venezuela Advances textile plant and 75 shoe-factory workers. The co-op's health and educational facilities serve the residents of the surrounding lower-class community in the western part of Caracas.

Alida Bastida, one of the textile work-

at 140,000 in 2006, but this year the Ministry of the Popular Economy announced that it counted only 74,000. Worse yet, a more recent census indicated only 48,000. Many cooperatives never got off the ground, and in other cases, cooperative members pocketed the money they received from loans or the down payments for contracts. One pro-Chávez congressman admitted, "Up until now, no one can say the cooperative program

The cooperatives that withstand the test of time could help transform Venezuelan society because a large number of their members come from the poorest sectors of the population.

the lives of Venezuela's poor, who were previously all but ignored by politicians.

Some of the opposition attribute alleged government ineptness to the lower-class makeup of the *Chavista* movement and the modest participation of educated middle-class professionals. In what could be interpreted as a slur on poor people who are viewed as dependent on handouts, Rosales referred to *Chavistas* as "parasites," a remark that one of his allies, Leopoldo Puchi, considered inappropriate. Chávez, however, has inadvertently strengthened this charge by making disparaging remarks about government "bureaucrats," and appointing ministers who lack professional experience.

State-nurtured cooperatives

More than any other program under Chávez, the balance sheet for the government's new worker cooperatives is mixed.

In 2004, the government created the Ministry of the Popular Economy to organize training programs and facilitate loans to encourage those enrolled to form cooperatives. By 2005, Chávez traveled through the country to authorize loans for cooperatives in televised "Regional Cabinet Meetings," where beneficiaries discussed their plans and answered questions. A large majority of the cooperatives consist of not many more than five members (the minimum number required by law) and engage in maintenance work for local governments and state companies such as the oil industry. Most of these cooperatives are made up of members of an extended family, a setup that generally functions well due to mutual trust among associates. Government spokesmen have hailed some cooperatives, such as those

ers elected supervisor, gave a tour and proudly pointed to the eight sewing machines recently purchased by her cooperative, as opposed to other machinery donated by the state oil company. Asked about worker absenteeism, she says, "If the worker has a legitimate health problem, they can get time off and receive the same salary as everyone else. But at the end of the year our cooperative's 'surplus' [profits] are divided up and distributed to each worker on the basis of the number of days worked." Bastida says that last year the surplus that workers received almost equaled their annual salary.

But the failure of many state financed cooperatives—due to improvisation or misuse of government funds—has resulted in the loss of tens, if not hundreds of millions of dollars. On the other hand, those cooperatives that have withstood the test of time may contribute to the transformation of society, particularly because so many of their members come from the non-privileged sectors of the population.

The cooperatives are heavily dependent on the state. Government incentives include generous credit, lenient terms of payment and exemption from all taxes. One sign of independence is when the cooperative pays off its original loan and purchases its own equipment. At a conference sponsored by the University of Carabobo, one co-op member said: "It gave us great satisfaction to have paid off our loan in seven months. Now it is they [the state bank] who are behind us, urging us to apply for new credit."

Experience has shown how difficult it is to decree such experimental changes in people's lives from above. The government placed the number of cooperatives

has been successful. In fact, there is little to show considering all the money that has been spent."

In response, the Ministry has tried to exercise greater control over the cooperatives, but in doing so may have gone to an opposite extreme. The cooperatives are now required every three months to solicit a Certificate of Fulfillment of Responsibilities issued by the Ministry's main office in Caracas. The paperwork, which includes a balance sheet signed by a certified accountant, is extremely time-consuming. The cooperative also needs to demonstrate solvency with regard to financial obligations to government agencies such as the social security system, the housing authority and the job-training institute.

Chávez and his followers generally attribute the problems facing cooperatives to their members' lack of social consciousness. As a corrective, they call for a cultural transformation along the lines of what Che Guevara called the "New Socialist Man." However, in its promotion of cooperatives and other social programs, the government faces a more practical problem that Chávez movement leaders haven't recognized. Mechanisms have been created to monitor cooperatives, but to date there no cooperative member has been penalized for failing to comply with their legal obligations. Although Minister of the Popular Economy Pedro Morejón announced late last year that he had taken 300 cases of cooperatives to court, it is unclear whether Chávez, who claims to be the president of the underprivileged, will be willing to jail, or seize the property of, poor people who have misspent public money.

On the plus side, many cooperative members have learned administrative

skills while at the same time changing their attitude toward cooperation and solidarity. By law, co-op members must work in their communities, carrying out maintenance service in schools, distributing Christmas presents to children or other tasks. Furthermore, the experience of sharing the profits of the enterprise breaks with the tradition of wage labor and is bound to influence the cooperativist's way of thinking.

The "massification" of education at all levels

The education "Mission" programs, which also involve hundreds of thousands of underprivileged Venezuelans, have been more successful than the cooperatives. The Missions, which provide primary, high school and university education mostly to adults, use Cuban-prepared video cassettes in the classrooms and "facilitators" who answer questions posed by the students.

In October 2005, Chávez announced that the program "Robinson Mission" had achieved its objective of teaching reading and writing skills to 1.5 million Venezuelans, thereby eliminating illiteracy in the nation. Some of the participants in the program, however, have only learned to sign their names. The "Ribas Mission" works with nearly 1 million Venezuelans, about 200,000 of whom receive stipends of about \$100 a month. The program reaches out to the most excluded members of society, such as the indigenous, the disabled, delinquents and prisoners.

Videocassettes have been used in school classrooms in other countries but never

on such a massive scale. Héctor Navarro, who has headed the Ribas Mission in the state of Bolívar over the last three years, explains the experimental nature of the program: "We wanted our facilitators to have a university education, but the vast majority are merely high school graduates. They learn as they go along. Training consists of problem-solving sessions among the facilitators with feedback from the school coordinator who typically has some university education."

Many Mission university students fear schools and professional associations that object to the unconventional nature of the program will not recognize their degrees. To avoid discrimination, the government has reached agreements with the universities controlled by the Ministry of Education whereby they help supervise the missions and issue the diplomas in their own name. The nation's larger universities, however, have refused to cooperate.

Members of the opposition claim that by lowering the quality of education, the Mission program is depreciating the value of existing degrees. According to them, rather than awarding grade school, high school and college degrees, the Missions should issue special diplomas to their students so as not to undermine the established educational system.

The need to assimilate errors

This combination of advances and missed opportunities characterizes not only social programs but all types of government activity. Chávez's revolutionary rhetoric and

actions have created great public expectations that in turn account for his resounding electoral successes. Yet his government faces a host of practical problems.

For instance, to its credit, the Chávez government has greatly expanded public transportation. Venezuela is one of the few countries in the world building out its rail system. In June, a trolleybus service was inaugurated in Mérida in the Andean mountains, making it the smallest city in Latin America to have such a system. Last year, subway systems began functioning in the cities of Valencia and Maracaibo, a new line was added to the metro in downtown Caracas, and two rail lines now connect that system with neighboring towns. The metro fare in Caracas is less than 25 cents and free for passengers over 60.

At the same time, oil-induced prosperity has exacerbated automobile traffic and its attendant problems. The first half of this year saw car sales increase by 52 percent over the same period last year; 65 percent of the purchases were imported vehicles. While Chávez has railed against SUVs, he has not placed a special tax on them or on cars in general. Indeed, the government has encouraged poor Venezuelans to purchase cars by exempting non-luxury from the value added tax.

But if Venezuela is to learn from the errors that are being committed on this untrodden path, discussion within the movement is essential. The private media is alive and well and continues to criticize the government, sometimes aggressively, notwithstanding the non-renewal of the TV channel "Radio Caracas." Opposition criticism is no substitute, however, for constructive criticism from those who support the "revolutionary" project.

But during the eight-and-a-half years in power, the pro-Chávez parties have failed to establish internal mechanisms of discussion. Chávez's recent creation of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which he claims will be the most "democratic party in Venezuelan history," is designed to overcome this shortcoming by holding internal elections and calling an ideological congress. With such considerable resources at its disposal, the government cannot expect to avoid mistakes, which in any case are inevitable in this trial-and-error road to change. Rather its main challenge is to figure out a way to encourage constructive debate in order to parlay frustrating experiences into new, effective programs. ■



A Cuban doctor works with a patient at a free health care clinic in Caracas.

Labor Takes a Seat in the Classroom

Educators are taking steps to bring union history into American schools

BY ADAM DOSTER

A WORKER APPROACHES THE THREE-PERSON National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) panel after filing a union grievance that her boss dismissed on unreasonable grounds. The board consults organized employees, workers with anti-union sensibilities and even the old boss to find out the details. Her complaint? The supervisor canned her because she had blonde hair and blue eyes. After some consultation, the board reaches a verdict. But, in this case, the ruling isn't as important as the process itself.

Mock union battles like this once took place in Paul F. Cole's classroom. Now the secretary-treasurer of the New York State AFL-CIO, Cole taught social studies at Lewiston-Porter Senior High School in Youngstown, N.Y. for 23 years. After becoming active in his local teacher's union, he noticed labor history was absent from his lesson plans. So he went about infusing bits and pieces of organized labor into classes—running “organizing campaigns,” studying the lives of labor leaders and letting students debate issues like right-to-work legislation. “The goal is not to indoctrinate or proselytize kids. That's unnecessary,” Cole says. “The goal is to provide kids with a deeper understanding of the history of the labor movement and the contributions workers have made to our economic, cultural and political history.”

Organized labor is rarely discussed in primary or secondary schools, and that is one reason the public is not adequately informed about the role unions have played in American life. A 2001 study by Hart Research found that 54 percent of respondents said they knew little to nothing about unions. Of those that had some knowledge, 37 percent gained it from personal experience, 26 percent from people in unions and 25 percent from the media. “They didn't even ask the question whether they learned anything in school,” says Cole. “That's an indictment right there.”



Labor's omission from K-12 education contributes to a troubling paradox. While a 2004 Zogby poll found that 63 percent of Americans approve of unions, deeming them helpful to workers, employers and the economy at large, union membership continues to decline, falling to 12 percent of the 2006 working population. While labor education is no replacement for reformed labor laws, informing young people about the movement's history and accomplishments may help the movement's future.

The old left is left out

Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*, says traditional historians overlook the history of working people by focusing on those with excess political capital. “The general orientation of American history is towards the history of people at the top, towards the authority or the establishment,” Zinn says. As a result, curricula centers on political, military

and business leaders, ignoring the rest.

Others contend that the study of racial and gender struggles in schools, while necessary and valuable, has shifted the focus away from an analysis of class. “My freshman students at college come out of California high schools with the language of race, ethnicity, and identity, and they have great facility with that,” says Nelson Lichtenstein, a labor historian at the University of California, Santa Barbara. “Issues of class and trade unions are often alien to them.” He cites César Chávez as a prime example of a progressive labor organizer whose history as a trade unionist is overshadowed by his legacy as an ethnic leader.

Teachers also affect how much exposure students have to labor's stories. In an era marked by high-stakes testing, many teachers must narrow their curricula to exclude non-tested subjects. With little room for experimentation, it's less likely that a stressed teacher, even if well versed in the narrative of la-

bor struggles, would cover the 1914 Ludlow Massacre of striking Colorado coal miners at the expense of a topic assured to be on the next assessment.

Labor always has benefits

Teaching children about the contributions America's working people have made to their lives provides important context. Restriction on child labor, the ever-longed-for weekend and public education itself were neither created in a vacuum nor implemented from the top; workers fought (and often got bloodied) in order to make life more palatable for Americans of all ages. Kids should know this when they are trying to make sense of the country's political and economic landscape.

Because the United States is considered an individualistic society, history lessons often highlight personal crusades at the expense of collective rights as well. By teaching children that individual workers achieved both economic security and personal dignity when they realized their collective power, teachers can instill agency in young people and provide models that will help them solve contemporary problems. "Students can see union victories as a concrete example and they understand that there's a historical prologue to what they are doing today," says Rich Yeselson, a coordinator at the Change to Win federation's Strategic Organizing Center. "They can see that change can happen if people explicitly come together to make [it]."

Instilling knowledge about labor's past could also help revive the fortunes of the union movement. As union membership has dropped from 35 percent of the working population in 1950 to just above 10 percent today, it's become harder for young people to learn first-hand the benefits of organizing. "Fifty years ago, you would hear [the value of unions] from people on the street, literally, from your friends and your neighbors," says Yeselson. "With less union density, you hear less stories like that and you don't know quite what a union does anymore."

This severing of historical memory, through the loss of oral histories and personal connections, or diminished media coverage makes it harder for the labor movement to organize potential members. If young people have no knowledge of what unions can do, why spend the time and money to join? And without a strong labor movement, progressives can

kiss a sustainable majority goodbye. "Going back to the French Revolution, the organization of work and workers stands at the core of democracy," says Lichtenstein. "And unless that understanding is there, we're going to be spinning our wheels."

Sharing resources

The lack of attention paid to labor in U.S. schools is finally being addressed. Across the country, educators and nonprofit orga-

The severing of historical memory, through the loss of oral histories, personal connections and diminished media coverage, makes it harder for the labor movement to organize members.

nizations are developing innovative ways to address unionism in the classroom. For example, the American Labor Studies Center (ALSC), based in upstate New York and headed by Cole, "collects, analyzes, evaluates, and disseminates labor studies curricula" to teachers nationwide through an interactive website. ALSC is also developing original educational programs. Partnering with the National Baseball Hall of Fame, the ALSC recently created "Hardballs and Handshakes," an instructional unit that uses professional baseball as a case study to understand the power of bargaining. And while the social sciences may provide an obvious fit for the study of labor, Cole points out that English teachers can assign biographies of labor leaders, art and music teachers can study protest songs and posters, and science teachers can focus on workplace safety and health issues.

Other organizations are not far behind. The California Federation of Teachers (CFT) created *Golden Lands, Working Hands*, a 10-part video series that familiarizes students with California labor history. Lichtenstein even screens some of them in his college courses. Los Angeles teacher Linda Tubach, a CFT member, developed the Collective Bargaining Education Project 10 years ago, a student-run simulation that teaches high schoolers how labor and management resolve workplace conflicts through negotiations. What started as a one-day event in the City of Angels grew into a full-time project where organizers run workshops in school districts around the country.

Age-appropriate labor books are available as well. The United Association for Labor Education has organized a list of

such resources on their website, including Zinn's recently published two-volume series *A Young People's History of the United States*, an adapted version of his bestseller. "I've had a good reaction from teachers who have written to me," he says. "Middle school teachers have said how happy they were that a book like this exists."

Key to the growth in K-12 labor studies has been the Internet, which has allowed teachers the opportunity to dig up scarce

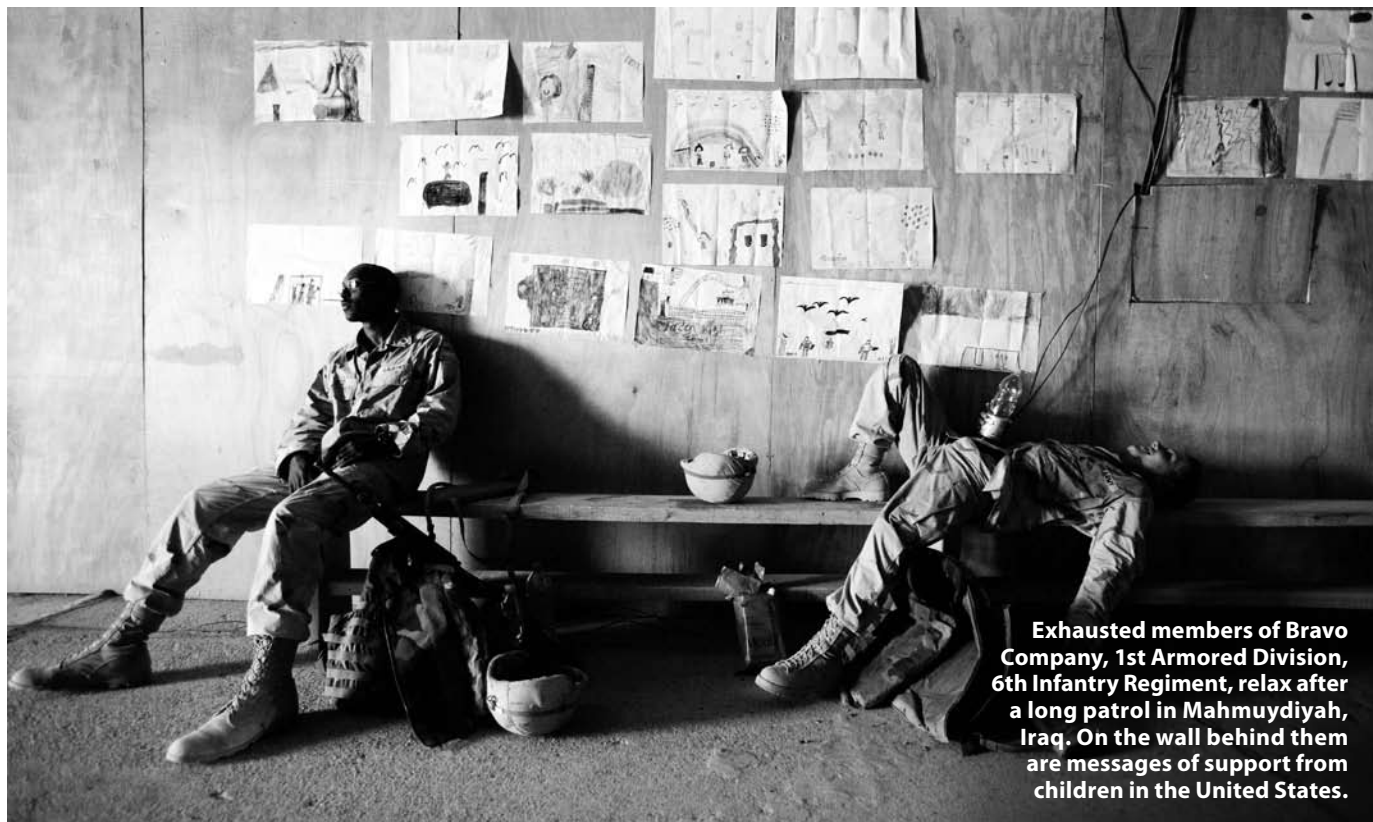
resources and share them with a broad audience. "With the click of the mouse, 43 million teachers are able to download our material for 50 million students," says Cole. "Twenty years ago, there's no way we could have afforded, as a non-for-profit organization, to collect and disseminate that much printed materials."

The design of these labor lessons should not burden overworked educators. Most of the material is created to supplement the unit divisions that many textbook companies use, meaning that existing sections won't need to be forfeited. Much of it is also standards-based, which is important for teachers worried about not conforming to No Child Left Behind. "We start with the standards and work backwards to find curriculum material that meets them," says Cole. And for teachers wary about how to broach contentious topics, a few natural entry points already exist. Some states, like New York and California, have specifically implemented labor history weeks or months. And lacking that, there's Labor Day, International Women's Day or May Day. Further seeking out partnerships with teachers' unions could add a valuable perspective, and be mutually beneficial.

The resources to teach students about America's storied labor history are there. It's up to educators to connect young people to a story that could have a lasting impact. "You want the people who read history, young people or people of any age, to recognize their own power and to recognize themselves in history," says Zinn. "After all, most of the people who are going to be reading and studying history are not going to be business executives. They are going to be working for a living." ■

BY SARAH OLSON

EXTENDING TOURS, STRESSING TROOPS



Exhausted members of Bravo Company, 1st Armored Division, 6th Infantry Regiment, relax after a long patrol in Mahmudiyah, Iraq. On the wall behind them are messages of support from children in the United States.

BRENT STIRTON/GETTY IMAGES

JUSTIN THOMPSON, 23, PROPOSED to Erin underneath the Eiffel Tower last February. The photos of the two on her MySpace page have the hallmarks of a young couple in love. Thompson can't wait to get back to Lacey, Wash., to get married, and go to college. There's one problem: Thompson is in Baghdad, serving his second deployment as a sergeant in the U.S. Army, and he is losing hope that he'll ever be allowed to leave.

Sgt. Thompson, assigned to the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team of the Second Infantry Division, was first deployed to Iraq in November 2003. When his unit returned to the United States one year later, he immediately started hearing rumors of redeployment and stop-loss—the military's age-old policy that compels soldiers to continue serving during war-

time, even after their contract expires. Four months later, the rumors were confirmed and Thompson was stop-lossed. Despite exhibiting signs of combat-related depression—uncontrolled anger and heavy drinking, for which he was repeatedly disciplined—Thompson redeployed to Iraq on June 28, 2006, exactly one day after his contract with the Army expired.

This April, while stationed in Baghdad, Thompson received another surprise. This second, involuntary tour would be extended by three months, as part of the Pentagon's new policy that the Army's standard tour of duty would be extended from 12 to 15 months. The news was devastating.

"I felt that I'd given everything I had to give," Thompson says. "I felt that I'd pushed myself to the brink of insanity

and back and that still wasn't enough. I fought in a war I didn't agree with, but I'd taken an oath saying that I would serve, so I did. I felt used up."

The Pentagon made this decision in spite of a growing body of medical research—all of which was available before the policy change—that shows longer tours are a primary cause of combat-related stress. Research also shows longer tours increase the psychological impact of traumatic experiences on soldiers, correlate to an increase in combat ethics violations, and put intense strains on military families. In short, increasing the length of deployment puts American soldiers, their families and Iraqis in danger.

Extending tours of duty

On April 10, 2007, when the Pentagon

announced that it was extending the standard tour to 15 months for all Army soldiers, it created the longest tours of duty since World War II. It also precipitated the first time in history that active-duty soldiers will—as a matter of policy—spend more time in combat than at home.

According to Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the extensions were needed to implement President George W. Bush's troop "surge" and the associated Baghdad security plan. Gates called the extensions "difficult but necessary," acknowledging that the longer tours would place a heavier burden on already war-weary soldiers and their families, but also suggesting that the consistency of the policy might relieve the uncertainty of its previous policy.

The decision is inexplicable to Dr. Charles Figley, director of the Psychological Stress Research Program at Florida State University and a pioneer in the field of traumatology. In 1975 he helped convene the Consortium of Veterans Studies, which coined the term "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD).

"Usually, changes in policy are driven by evidence," Figley says. "But these changes are being implemented to satisfy a political, civilian goal. We've never in history had a situation like this, with a war this long and with this many multiple deployments."

Psychological costs

To date, more than 1.5 million members of the armed services have cycled through Iraq. One-third of these have served two combat tours, 70,000 have served three, and 20,000 have been deployed five times or more.

The majority of soldiers experience some sort of traumatic event during their deployment. According to a 2004 study by Dr. Charles Hoge and his colleagues at the Walter Reed Medical Center, 95 percent reported seeing dead bodies, 95 percent reported being shot at, 89 percent said they were ambushed, 86 percent said they knew someone who was killed or wounded, and 69 percent said they had seen injured Iraqi civilians, but felt they could do nothing about it.

A 2006 study by the Army's Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT) found that 17 percent of soldiers returning from Iraq screened positive for symptoms of combat stress, and that acute combat stress is substantially higher in soldiers with prior deployments; 18 percent of soldiers with prior deployments screened positive

for acute stress compared to 12.5 percent on their first deployment. This study also found that at least 14 percent of soldiers currently serving in Iraq are taking drugs to treat depression or trauma.

The Army's fourth MHAT study, released in May, is the first to examine deployment length. It found that deployment length is one of the top non-combat-related factors that contributes to stress. Soldiers

'When you kick open an Iraqi's door in the middle of the night, wake up a family, watch the children cry and listen to the women scream, the last word that goes through your head is hero.'

deployed for longer than six months are roughly 150 percent more likely to experience acute stress than soldiers deployed for less than six months. These findings coincide with those of a 2006 RAND Corporation study, which found that as the length of the tour increases, so does the rate of stress reactions.

The May MHAT study also examined for the first time combat-ethics regulations. It found that while 10 percent of soldiers admitted to mistreating Iraqi civilians, soldiers experiencing combat-related stress were twice as likely to do so. The findings suggest the "one bad apple" claims that the military promulgated during recent court-martials is nonsense. Not only are combat-ethics violations predictable, they are also direct results of decisions made by the Bush administration and the Department of Defense.

War is indeed hell

For many soldiers, acute stress is the natural result of their experiences on duty. As an infantryman, Thompson says he's deeply troubled by what he's seen during his tours of duty in Iraq. Consequently, he has become outspoken in his opposition to the Iraq War, despite still being on active duty.

"When you kick open an Iraqi's door in the middle of the night, wake up a family, watch the children cry and listen to the women scream, the last word that goes through your head is hero," he says. "When you arrest the family's father because he's a suspected IED maker, who you know is most likely innocent, and hand him to the Iraqi Army who will beat a confession out of him, hero isn't as accurate as state-sponsored terrorist. When the streets are

flooded as far as you can see with protesters demanding that the United States end its operations in Iraq, you don't exactly feel like you're liberating anyone."

Thompson says he understands what has allowed him to survive in combat. "I recognized that in order to cope with what I had to do—in order to cope with killing—I had to make my heart cold. I had to dehumanize Iraqis in order to justify kill-

ing them. Even though I'd become aware of this behavior, I couldn't let go of it. I had to become something I wasn't in order to save my sanity."

According to Carl Mumpower, a therapist who specializes in post-traumatic stress disorder and veterans issues, such reactions are normal. "Turning off the switches that you've worked so hard to turn on in order to survive in a war zone is not easy."

The process of transitioning out of a war zone takes a long time, especially for people who have experienced multiple traumatic events, Mumpower says. The problem is that with increasingly frequent and longer deployments, soldiers do not have enough time away from the war zone to recover and heal. And when redeployed, someone who has not fully recovered from their previous deployment is more likely to suffer serious combat stress injuries.

Figley likens soldiers' combat stress injuries to runners' sprained ankles. "You can go on various long runs throughout your life," he says. "But if you run on a sprain, you are asking for a more serious injury. You don't run on a sprain. You need to give yourself time to heal."

Readjustment and delayed trauma

Soldiers serving for longer and multiple deployments have higher levels of combat-related trauma and consequently are at greater risk of experiencing any of the myriad post-deployment and readjustment problems when they return home.

Studies indicate that soldiers can screen negative for combat stress injuries upon returning from Iraq, but screen positive seven months later. An October

2006 study, published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, found that 78 percent of veterans who had screened negative for symptoms of PTSD or depression one month after returning from Iraq screened positive when tested again six months later.

These findings raise two concerns. First, if it takes time for symptoms of depression or PTSD to manifest, then prolonged follow-up care for soldiers is vital. Military officials claim mental health care is available to soldiers both at home and in Iraq. But significant barriers stand in the way of accessing that care and personal testimony indicates it's not always available. In his 2004 study, Walter Reed's Dr. Hoge found that only about 40 percent of soldiers screening positive for combat-related mental health disorders had expressed interest in receiving help from the military. Of that 40 percent, only 23 to 40 percent had received counseling within the past year.

The second concern is that soldiers are being redeployed to Iraq before they have been diagnosed with PTSD or depression. Consequently they are serving second, third or even fourth tours suffering from

undiagnosed stress disorders. In 2006, the under secretary of Defense responsible for Health Affairs, in a deviation from previous policy, announced that service members with diagnosed mental health problems and those taking psychotropic medications could be redeployed. Yet all available research indicates soldiers experiencing acute stress are more likely to harm Iraqi civilians and sustain mental health disorders.

No help on the horizon

Despite the studies clearly linking longer tours with higher rates of combat stress, Defense Secretary Gates is considering even further extending the tours of troops currently serving in Iraq—this time from 15 to 18 months. Gates says this is a “worst-case scenario,” but few other options exist if troops levels are to be maintained at current levels.

While members of Congress are quick to verbally support the troops, their words are not always followed up by action. In July, Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.) introduced legislation specifying that active-duty soldiers receive at least the same length of time at home as their deployment in combat. Although this modest measure received 56 votes, that was still four shy of overcoming a Republican filibuster. On August 2, the House passed a similar measure, which included a provision allowing the president to disregard the new required rest time if deployment is necessary “to meet a threat to the national security interests of the United States.”

President Bush has threatened to veto the bill, and the House's 229 to 194 vote margin lacks the two-thirds majority needed to override a presidential veto. Upon passage of the August 2 measure, the White House issued a statement saying the bill would “impose inappropriate, operationally unsound and arbitrary constraints on how the Department of Defense should prepare units to deploy.”

But the failure to redress troops' mental health concerns hasn't been solely the fault of politicians. After finding that only 5 percent of soldiers in Iraq take any rest and relaxation, the Army's May MHAT study recommended that troops in high intensity combat receive one month of in-theater R&R for every three months of combat. The report says it has “long been recognized that mental health breakdowns occur after prolonged combat exposure,” and that the

conditions under which today's soldiers are fighting constitute an undue burden. “A considerable number of soldiers and Marines are conducting combat operations every day of the week, 10-12 hours per day, for months on end.” Shortly after the MHAT study's release, however, Pentagon officials quickly rejected its recommendations as unworkable.

Often, programs are not only underfunded or politically unfeasible, but encounter real, structural problems. For example, two recently introduced programs—the Army's Combat Stress Control program and the Operational Stress Control and Readiness program for the Navy and Marines—provide front-line combat stress relief by embedding mental health professionals within military units. In addition, the Army announced plans in June to spend up to \$33 million to add 200 more mental health professionals to its ranks. But both proposals have ignored the observations of the American Psychological Association that roughly 40 percent of the funded positions for military mental health providers are vacant and cannot be filled.

And so it goes ...

As for Thompson, he's still in Baghdad, trying to make sense of what he's been asked to do. He doesn't see the U.S. military presence achieving its goals, especially when it comes to the business of “winning hearts and minds” that the Pentagon's always talking about. For that, you need cultural exchange and interaction—something a military occupation makes impossible. “So much is lost when you hold a gun,” Thompson says. “You can't just go to the bakery downtown and get some flat bread. You go to the bakery in a flak vest and helmet, with your M4 accompanied by vehicles and aerial support.”

Thompson says everyone he's talked to feels the painful impact of the extensions. “Imagine having every facet of your life dictated to you—when to wake up, what to wear, where you're going. It's never something you liked, but you do it because you made a commitment. Then you find out you have to stick around for another year. Soon, that year becomes 15 months. And even when the media does talk about ‘the troops,’ no one ever discusses what soldiers live with every day. We are in a country where our friends are going to die, and we may or may not make it back to get married and go to college.” ■

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Scorned on the Bayou

Louisianans fear a new plan to restore costal wetlands could destroy their way of life

BY MELINDA TUHUS

GEORGE BARISICH HAS BEEN shrimping and oystering in the Louisiana bayous—“everywhere I can float,” he says—for 40 of his 50 years. He harvests oysters in brackish water (mixed salt and fresh) since they grow only in a certain salinity, and he catches shrimp from eastern Mississippi to western Louisiana, mostly on inland bays and lakes.

He’s one of 6,000 commercial fishing license holders in Louisiana, although since the 2005 hurricane season only 1,500 of them have been able to return to work—the boats of the rest were destroyed. And there’ll always be a spot on board for his sons if they decide to follow in his footsteps—as he did in his father’s. But, he says, “a crash is coming,” probably within the next decade, unless the commercial fishermen, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, environmental advocates, oil and gas companies, and the state and federal governments can agree on a plan to stop, if not reverse, the loss of the wetlands that provide the richest seafood harvest in America.

In late August and September 2005, the one-two punch of hurricanes Katrina and Rita battered the Louisiana Gulf Coast and obliterated 200 square miles of wetlands, greatly exacerbating the ongoing wetlands loss due to long-term natural processes and human activity. Since the ’30s, more land has disappeared more quickly off the Louisiana coast than anywhere else in the world—the equivalent of a football field every 45 minutes.

For many years this rich ecosystem—which ranges from saltwater to brackish to freshwater and which is home to a fascinating array of shellfish, fin fish and the birds and other animals that feed on them—was dismissed as merely “swamp.” But for at least three decades, its disappearance has alarmed scientists, government officials and those who depend on the estuaries for their livelihoods and their Cajun way of life—in which fishing and trapping have provided sustenance and a degree of independence from mainstream American culture, not to mention fabulous food and



The wetlands of the Mississippi River delta in Louisiana.

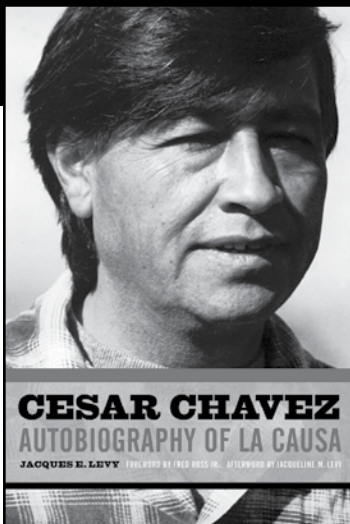
BY ANDY NELSON/THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR VIA GETTY IMAGES

memorable music. Many plans for restoring the wetlands—or at least slowing their destruction—have emerged. Action has been harder to come by.

LOOK AT A map of Louisiana and you’ll see the fingers of land that brush the Gulf of Mexico. These fingers were built up over thousands of years by the rich silt deposits carried by the Mississippi River to its mouth. Over time, the silt compacts and the land sinks, in a

process called natural subsidence. This ecosystem includes the remaining barrier islands in the Gulf, salt marsh, brackish marsh, freshwater marsh and hardwood forests, ranging from lowest elevation to highest, which is still just a few feet above sea level. But since levees were built by the Corps of Engineers beginning a century ago to channel the river and control its natural flooding in order to protect industrial infrastructure and the residents, the silt—400 million tons every year—has

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been dumped uselessly into deep Gulf waters, resulting in no new land-building. In addition, since the '30s, the oil and gas industry has bulldozed 8,000 miles of canals throughout the wetlands to carry on its business, a process that experts—like Mark Davis, director of the Institute on Water Resources, Law and Policy at Tulane University—say accounts for about 35 percent of the destruction.

The Barataria and Terrebonne estuaries—which encompass four million acres of the very richest and fastest-disappearing part of the Louisiana Gulf coast—produce nearly 20 percent of the nation's annual seafood catch from mixed salt and fresh water. Louisiana Highway 1 bisects the two estuaries, and leads to Port Fourchon on the edge of the Gulf. The port is a vital energy hub, handling almost a fifth of domestic oil production and 14 percent of the crude oil imported into the United States. The telephone poles paralleling the road now stand in several feet of water, and low-lying graveyards are relinquishing their dead to the sea. Off the coast, Grand Isle stands as one of the last remaining barrier islands that buffer wetlands from Gulf storms.

Barisich, president of the United Commercial Fishermen's Association in Louisiana, says he and others have been asking the Corps and the state and federal governments for years to build a rock jetty to protect the island, to no avail. "The money they spent on studies alone in the last 30 or 40 years, they could have paid to put the rocks all the way across there," he says. "Or, pump the sand—the sand's right there. Pump it up from the Gulf, and build your levees, outside. You need that barrier reef."

Destroying a way of life

A comprehensive plan to save the Mississippi's estuary has been developed by dozens of groups brought together by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, or BTNEP. Congress created the National Estuary Program in 1987 to improve the quality of estuaries—"places where rivers meet the sea," according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA oversees the 28 estuaries of national significance, including Chesapeake Bay and Long Island Sound. BTNEP encompasses the heart of bayou country, bounded by the Mississippi River in the east and the Atchafalaya River in the west.

In 1996, BTNEP came up with a Com-

prehensive Coastal Management Plan to help preserve the wetlands within its boundaries in a way that balanced the needs of the various stakeholders. The plan included small water diversions and land-building by piping in sediments from nearby areas to restore the wetlands, says BTNEP Executive Director Kerry St. Pé, from his map-cluttered office at Nichols State University in Thibodeaux, La. "That allows us to put the sediments where we need them in the shortest period of time," he says. The plan was approved by both the state of Louisiana and the EPA, but little has been implemented.

However, no price tag was attached to the plan. "The scope of what we're talking about is incredible. It would have been ridiculous to put a price tag on it," says St. Pé, because the situation is constantly changing. He did note that restoring a single barrier island costs \$27 million. In 1998, the Corps of Engineers released its Coast 2050 plan, a \$14 billion proposal that, if fully implemented, would have protected or restored almost half a million acres of wetlands in the Barataria basin. (St. Pé calls that estimate "a very conservative guess.") But that was deemed too expensive by the federal government, which requested a \$2 billion version, which Congress was considering when the hurricanes struck in 2005.

After the hurricanes, the state of Louisiana formed the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), which released its plan in April. Its executive summary states, "Coastal restoration measures are identified based on the premise that restoring sustainability to the coastal landscape is a priority. Diversions of Mississippi and Atchafalaya River water are, therefore, prominent in the plan."

These massive freshwater diversions would mimic the land-building of the untamed Mississippi River of old, but would also bring major salinity changes to the wetlands system that St. Pé says will not be acceptable to all the stakeholders, especially the residents of the bayous.

"It would destroy our way of life. It would annihilate it," says St. Pé, whose family has lived in the area for seven generations. Each kind of shellfish or fin fish in the area flourishes in water with a different level of salinity, from the salt marsh nearest the Gulf to brackish, to freshwater marsh further inland. "You can't raise oysters, you can't catch brown shrimp, you can't catch blue crabs or

BY AARON SARVER

Creating the 21st Century Library

When you enter the Prelinger Library in San Francisco, the first thing you notice is “rock star” librarian Nancy Pearl—in action figure form. It’s the first hint that you’ve stepped inside an unconventional library. Megan and Rick Prelinger’s vision of engaged learning is at

odds with the weighty atmosphere that often pervades spaces containing 40,000 items—ranging from books to maps to films—intended for research purposes. Rick first achieved fame in the archivist world when his collection of 60,000 16mm educational films, known as the Prelinger Archive, was purchased by the Library of Congress in 2002.

Three years later, after the dot com bust had dragged down commercial rents, the couple leased a 1,700-square-foot warehouse space in San Francisco’s SoMa (South of Market) neighborhood and moved their massive book collection out of storage. (This is what happens when two archivists gets married.) Four long, 15-foot-high rows of bookshelves loom over guests, but the extraordinarily high ceilings make the book towers less imposing. Boxes of “ephemera” sit neatly stacked up against the far left row. And the back of the library has an unruly pile of boxes of books waiting to be shelved.

The Prelinger Library eschews the Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress systems, and is organized instead by what Megan calls “a map of my brain.” Books are grouped by topic, in a related fashion. Western U.S. history merges into agriculture, which merges into urban planning. Since space is limited, there is a decent amount of churn. Under-used items are phased out and new ones brought in. During my visit, a few boxes of the recently defunct magazine *Punk Planet* (see page 38) had just arrived. With funding from the Internet Archive, the Prelinger Library is

digitally scanning the books in its collection that are not under copyright protection for use on archive.org.

In These Times recently sat down to talk with Megan Shaw Prelinger.

What makes someone start her own library?

One of the multiple barriers put in place by major research libraries is that they don’t enable ordinary people to make use of extraordinary materials. So the idea of making a library was fed by my experience that college and university libraries’ closed stacks inhibit browsing and the process of random discovery. I always felt like I had my best ideas or developed my best projects when I was wandering and looking for certain things, but then finding things I didn’t expect.

How did this “process of random discovery” inform how you structured your library?

Even at public libraries, the subjects I was interested in were scattered. They were either not present at all or organized in a way that made no intuitive sense to me. Neither Dewey Decimal nor Library of Congress as an organization method made any intuitive sense to me. It’s like organizing your record collection or book collection at home. I’ve always used organization as a way to create juxtapositions and cluster little sets of coherency in my own book collection in a way that pleases me.

Is it fair to say that your organization

of materials is an implicit critique of the way people are taught to learn or to research? That you want to explore ideas in the way that someone like Walter Benjamin did, rather than through a rigid system imposed by very structured institutions?

I think it’s an explicit critique. We tell people that you’re going to find things “intershelfed.” You’re going to find government documents next to nonfiction and fiction. Materials are clustered by subject and we want people to have the shelf be an experience unto itself.

If it doesn’t occur to you or it isn’t explained to you that printed ephemera, historic magazines, photograph collections, maps, fiction can all be equally meaningful to your area of inquiry, you might not know to look for those things. So we try to create a browsing experience that can’t be had anywhere else. People come in and ask, “There’s no computer?” They have been trained to formulate a query rather than just engaging the shelves unmediated.

How do you think the digitization of books should effect how libraries manage their print collections?

In the library and document preservation worlds, there exists a concern that the growth of the digital environment will result in the end of print, and that books and newspapers need to be rescued from the digital future. I don’t believe that. Books as artifacts will always have value apart from their digital counterparts.

Yes, the online environment obviously offers mass dispersal into the world and that’s not possible in a print library environment. But part of our library project is about collapsing the polarization between print and digital, and looking toward a third way where a library can be a hybrid analog-digital space. Books are both retained and valued, and where a digital collection exists, maybe it allows more freedom with what the analog collection can do, because you can always do a keyword



Megan Prelinger organizes her library according to "a map of my brain."

search of the digital collection. Maybe the benefits of one liberate the other.

How much consideration does the Prelinger Library give to creating a public space where scholars and regular patrons can meet each other?

A lot of living and contemporary authors donate materials to the library. People will pick up a book and say, "I didn't know about this book," and we'll tell them the author is a professor at Berkeley and that he has said you could go talk to him. When you're browsing at a terminal, you're not going to bump elbows with someone who's interested in the same things.

Are there any specific things you're looking to add to the collection?

We look to preserve the historiography of underreported historical narratives—primarily North American because that's our history. Usually when things like that become available, we want them.

With 1,700-square-feet of space we can't position ourselves as rescuing all print. But with something like the Bureau of Indian Affairs records [which the Prelinger Library recently received from another library that was about to discard them], that was very clear. Talk about underreported historical narratives—you can hardly get

more underserved than Native American cultural history. There are Bureau documents from the 1870s when white ethnographers lived among Native Americans and wrote, "We think most of the Indian raids on the neighboring white settlement camps are being perpetrated by white settlers dressing up as Indians and robbing their neighbors." What happened? That idea—that observation—has been buried, dismissed and ignored for 130 years. When you read things like that, it legitimates the act of rescuing these documents and makes it even more urgent to do so.

Copyright has come into play in digitizing works. You were part of the lawsuit *Kahle-Prelinger v. Gonzalez* that was about orphaned works. Can you explain what the term orphaned works means?

In the United States, everything published prior to 1923 is in the public domain and everything published since 1963 is automatically under copyright. So there's a grey area between '23 and '63 where only about 15 percent of all copyrights were renewed. So we're able to digitize 85 percent of stuff in that 40-year period. Large changes in the law in 1998 extended copyright, so even if the author elects to let their work enter the public domain, the

government automatically renews that copyright.

Now copyright is very difficult to opt-out of. It's life of the author plus 70 years. If the rights-holder no longer exists and the institutional author, say a textbook company, is dissolved, then the copyright laws protect no one. In a lot of cases, works being digitized bring authors new audiences that they didn't have before. So our argument is that existing copyright renewal laws do a disservice. We want the opportunity to digitally disseminate works that have been abandoned by their authors.

Are there any specific works that you think need to be digitized so they can be available for research?

Textbooks and songbooks. Tour guide books that explain how to go on excursions and investigations. If those were digitized, we could layer a map from 1965 onto a map from 1945 and trace landscape changes. You can do that for earlier years, but history becomes locked up in 1963.

So if an author is deceased and his or her books are out of print, it is still illegal to digitize them, even though there are a dwindling number of physical copies of the work?

Right. That's tragic. It doesn't serve the authors. The legislation was devised to serve corporate interests. Yes, there are authors who are selling millions of books who want their copyrights to be held in their family in perpetuity. They should have that right. All we want is to be able to digitize works if we've done due diligence to locate an author or a rights-holder and if that rights-holder no longer exists or is supportive of digitizing the work.

Like other librarians, do you see yourself as a defender of civil liberties?

Yes and no. As an unincorporated library, we were never subject to the Patriot Act. In a broad sense, you can view the Prelinger Library as a democratizing project. Pushing history out of dusty corners and making it relevant and usable to people doing work today.

To me the idea of a library as an arcane space and privileged space, a space separate from relevance to everyday life, is wrapped up in the general historical trend of anti-intellectualism. Libraries should be social spaces and idea playgrounds—places where people are free to get excited about ideas. ■



BY ANNE ELIZABETH MOORE

In Condemnation of Opting In

Within a few days of the announcement that *Punk Planet* magazine (which I co-edited for three years) was shutting down, our compadre in Chicago music journalism, Pitchforkmedia.com, dropped the sad news that the

underground (and indie-supporting) stalwart Sonic Youth was signing a recording deal with Starbucks.

These were not synchronous events. They were causal, symbiotic even, if you are the megacorporate monolith. For 13 years, *Punk Planet* devoted itself to reviewing every single independent music release we received, regardless of musical genre, and refused all big business advertising and content featuring major media players. Now it is gone, and what is taking its place? Starbucks.

Critics rushed to accuse Sonic Youth of selling out. Yet the hubbub about this being a revival of the great “sell-out” debates of the ’90s misses the point. Post-Nirvana, when bands jumped from independent la-

bels to corporate majors, they did so for direct and indirect financial gain. Major labels offered a bigger audience and fat advances that allowed members to quit shitty day jobs and jump on what they hoped would be a fast track to success. Hot for the next Green Day and gearing up for the Telecom Act of 1996, the big labels were willing to make promises they’d never keep. The bands that signed left behind the friends who’d brought them onto independent labels in the first place, nurtured their smaller audiences, and provided them an autonomous but supportive environment to explore their sound. Sometimes indie labels were OK with the jump; after all, they couldn’t keep up with runaway demand

for releases. But most everyone involved ended up angry and hurt: the labels, the bands, and sometimes, later, the major label reps whose bosses had promised to shepherd their picks through the process and didn't follow through. "Sell-out" became the ultimate insult, a trade-in of community for money.

These days the transaction isn't as clear: A band rarely leaps from an independent label to a major because many independent labels have been shoved out of business, forced to cut back on releases, or are unable to support records with advertising. Since media consolidation kicked in full-bore 11 years ago, radio play has homogenized around Sony and TimeWarner subsidiary releases. The process has seemed more natural online, with the integration of iTunes into our daily music discussions, and scant attention paid to what may not be available on iTunes—or online at all. Licensing deals are more common for lesser-known bands on independent labels, and taking them is one of the very few options available for musicians who want anyone to hear their sound. The culture that was sold out in the '90s has in this decade been forced off the market. There is no more selling out; there is only opting in. To engage now, you do so under conditions over which you have no control.

And while these changes may seem organic, they are part of a cultural shift born of legislation that deregulated all media in the understanding that the unregulated pursuit of profit, rather than a democratic culture, is a goal shared by all. Of course, this legislation was not written by a coalition of indie music labels. They fought it tooth and nail, along with other independent media producers and political activists keen to defend the nation's bedrock democratic ideals.

Punk Planet watched this cultural shift closely over the last three years as major media comically tried to procure our ad space. "Corporate connections are never [as] cut-and-dry as we would like them to be," one CableVision-owned hack lectured us. He was on his third round of emails, the point of each having been to demand that we throw our 13-year-old ad policy (stated simply: no major media) into the toilet for his corporate-owned product. "But I'm a subscriber!" was

how a similar exchange had ended some months before.

Despite CableVision's assertion (and earlier, Nike's, Victory Records', HarperCollins', and so many others) that these things just don't matter anymore, a small group of us still believes that they do.

But our voices are being drowned out by

it all: Jones Soda, now available in a Starbucks near you. Fully designed at its mid-'90's creation to "co-opt" the "counterculture"—as well as shuttle in egregious new marketing ploys like Proctor and Gambles' youth word-of-mouth marketing program "Tremor"—Jones Soda brought product placement to those who

The culture that was sold out in the '90s has, in this decade, been forced off the market. There is no more selling out; there is only opting in.

our peers in the supposedly independent media. Not just by Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore, who glibly calls Starbucks "the new record store," but by music journalists like the *Chicago Reader's* Miles Raymer, who recently argued in a piece called "In Praise of Selling Out" that the music industry's decline can be "rescued by corporations that make everything but music." Even if, as he acknowledges, salvation means a venue containing "no possible sight line that [doesn't] intersect a poster, placard, or video screen carrying one or more sponsors' logos."

Utne Reader, itself recently sold to Ogden Publications, takes a stab at more thoughtful criticism, postulating that the naked consumerism of bands who opt in may overshadow their musical accomplishments. "While bands stand to profit from advertising's exposure in the short term, will their openness to corporate patronage eventually leave them an unwanted legacy of being 'the band that made that song from that car ad'?" Eric Kelsey asked in a July 5 story. Yet his query supposes a future where marketing and culture are not merged, and a past, perhaps foggily remembered, where such things mattered.

Now history is being rewritten. "Punk rockers are supposed to be especially hostile to the Man, but music consumers in the 15 to 24 demographic grew up watching punk, emo, and metalcore bands on the Vans Warped Tour, Rockstar Energy Drink's Taste of Chaos tour, and the Honda Civic Tour," Raymer writes. He ignores the debates that took place surrounding each of these sponsored tours, and blinds himself to the one that started

hated products, through innovations like skateboard tour sponsorships and punk-rock venue vending machines. It marked the shift from the age of "selling out" to the age of "opting in."

Unfortunately, the spaces devoted to drawing that line—reminding us that corporate sponsorship is an option we can *refuse*—have themselves succumbed to the times. *Punk Planet* is only one of many venues for corporate criticism no longer available, and although it may have been the last canary in this particular coal mine, it was still a canary. If Raymer is right, and the worst that bands have to fear is that they will be remembered as ad fodder instead of artists, at least they will be remembered. And the last vestiges of independent cultural production will wither and die.

"Old-timey indie ideals," Raymer calls this line of criticism, and he's right. I remember when it was common for kids to think of something, tape it or write it down or paste it up, and put it out into the world without having to go through a profit-minded distributor, music label or ISP. I remember when I could refuse to consent to demands made by big media and still have a place to work the next day. I remember autonomous cultural production done for the sake of promoting ideas and not achieving fame or fortune, and independent publishing devoted to engaged and critical journalism. And I remember when I could find music that didn't put money into the pockets of the corporate giant that shut down the coffeeshop where I used to paste up my zines. I remember democracy. Those were the days. ■

BOOKS

The Secret Lives of Plutocrats

By David Moberg

ED BAZINET LIVES in Richistan. He moved there after pocketing more than \$100 million from the sale of his company, which peddled miniature ceramic houses made in Taiwan to enthusiastic collectors whose interest Bazinet never understood. (He would disparagingly stamp their gushing letters of appreciation “get a life.”) His more famous neighbors include the Walton family, Microsoft mogul Bill Gates, investor Warren Buffet, and media tycoon Rupert Murdoch.

Where is Richistan? According to *Wall Street Journal* reporter Robert Frank, it's the domain—effectively a country more foreign to us than the other “stans” on the map—of the world's households that are worth \$1 million or more. But these 9 million-plus households, which have more than doubled in number over the past decade, actually are further divided into distinct provinces of Lower, Middle and Upper Richistan, as well as Billionaireville—population 400 and growing.

In *Richistan* (Crown), Frank offers a breezy, well-observed peek into this gated community. You too could visit if you graduate from “butler boot camp” and become a \$120,000-a-year “household manager,” overseeing one of the several far-flung homes and extensive staffs of any Richistani who qualifies as really rich by having a fortune of \$10 million or more. Each year the richest half percent of American households—around 730,000 families—spend about as much as all Italians combined—about 24 million households. And even as many Richistanis insist they're really simple, middle-class folks, they indulge in competitive consumption of 500-foot yachts (with such amenities as basketball courts, submarines, stripper poles and helipads), \$736,000 watches and art collections to fill their 70,000-square-foot mansions.

Not since the '20s, before the Depression and New Deal laws compressed incomes, has wealth been so concentrated at the top in the United States. The old rich increasingly are swamped by new multimillionaires who were founders or executives of companies that went public or were acquired by another company,



Mansion, anyone?

lavishly compensated corporate chief executives, or “money movers,” such as the hedge fund and private equity managers now making more than \$1 billion a year. By Frank's reckoning, they're a diverse lot, who are not always happy with their wealth nor respected by their peers. Some continue pursuing wealth and power; others promote novel charitable initiatives or even progressive political goals. (Billionaires, he reports, vote more Democratic than mere millionaires.)

The lives of the poor are studied to death, but the rich escape scrutiny. So Frank's report is a welcome, highly readable glimpse over the walls surrounding Richistan, combined with warnings about the troubling gap between the very rich and everyone else. That gap is likely to widen as the global rich further detach themselves from national roots and identify more with each other. But other than noting that new technologies and financial deregulation contributed to the wealth boom, Frank fails to analyze the political and economic decisions that led to this new inequality, nor does he explore its effects on everyone else. Though an informative, amusing and often infuriating travelogue, *Richistan* fails to look beyond the veneer of contemporary wealth and power.

Jack Beatty, a senior editor at the *Atlantic Monthly*, offers a vivid, impassioned account of how the rich triumphed in late 19th century America, and he clearly sees that history as a guide to how contemporary Richistan emerged. In *Age of Betrayal: The Triumph of Money in America, 1865-1900* (Knopf), Beatty shows how the rich prospered through a “revolution from above” that betrayed the demo-

cratic possibilities for America that were emerging at the end of the Civil War. The promise was reflected in constitutional amendments to free the slaves, extend the franchise, and guarantee equal treatment before the law, as well as Reconstruction's intended economic transformation of the slave South. But ultimately the North gave up on Reconstruction, failed to fight white terrorism against blacks after the war and abandoned former slaves to worsening, near-slave conditions.

The betrayal went much further: Corrupt politicians and courts provided favors to the men who owned the country's rapidly expanding big businesses, especially the railroads, granting them the constitutional protections that were intended for citizens. Corporations gained legal recognition as persons by virtue of an inaccurate summary note of a Supreme Court decision in the 1886 case of *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company*, and even after Congress eventually passed antitrust laws, the courts enforced those laws against unions, not corporations.

The revolution from above politically and economically deprived farmers in the West, white and black tenants and sharecroppers in the South, native white and immigrant workers in the East and Midwest. While the frontier beckoned as an escape, Beatty argues it was an illusion: The Homestead Act provided land to less than 400,000 families over three decades, but the rail magnates and land speculators took over huge swaths of public land. Instead, the new order—where farmers confronted falling grain prices, monopoly corporations and tariffs that protected the new industries but raised their costs—

drove farmers from the land into factories, or else kept them trapped in impoverished indebtedness producing cotton.

Workers, farmers and sharecroppers fought back, often facing extreme violence, but the rebellion failed. Beatty argues that after the Civil War, both Republicans in the North and Democrats in the South played up sectional antagonisms from the Civil War. Rather than vote according to class issues unleashed by industrialization and laissez-faire capitalism, citizens were diverted by politicians' appeals to Civil War loyalties. And despite some noble efforts to unite black and white sharecroppers, Southern populism foundered on racism, as well as interneccine squabbles and the U.S. political system's structural barriers to third parties.

The battle did not end with the defeat of populism. But Beatty portrays early 20th century progressive politics as a watered-down alternative to populism that, in the name of anti-corruption reform, suppressed political activity by lower-income voters. Obviously the New Deal and movements of the '60s tamed some

of the abuses of corporate power and racism, and the United States enjoyed a period of growing equality and prosperity.

Yet the past 35 years have seen a growth of inequality that parallels the period Beatty depicts. Corporations have gained political clout, suppressing unions in more genteel ways than a century earlier but just as effectively. Globalization, imperial ambitions and financial speculation—important factors in the triumph of the rich more than century ago—have played even more influential roles in the new rise of the Richistanis. In the late 19th century, the railroad transformed the economy and created opportunities for huge fortunes. The digital revolution is now playing a similar role (with public subsidies once again contributing to that new wealth). But one of the biggest differences is that there has been no citizen uproar comparable to that earlier period.

Apologists for inequality and concentrated wealth say Americans don't care, as long as they think they have a chance at wealth. But in *Falling Behind: How Rising Inequality Harms the Middle Class*

(University of California Press), Cornell University economist Robert H. Frank argues that middle-class Americans ought to be concerned about rising inequality because it harms them.

Frank skips over the most obvious harm: According to economists Frank Levy and Peter Temin, the top 1 percent of earners have captured four-fifths of all new income since 1980. A few decades ago that money would have been shared more equitably with the poor and middle class. Frank does note that studies have found that economies tend to grow slower during less egalitarian periods, and this era is no exception.

His key argument, however, is that people make many judgments about their needs within a social context. Whether it's a hard-wired product of evolution (as Frank thinks) or simply a truism about human social behavior, people everywhere tend to evaluate their needs for housing, food, clothing and other goods in terms of what people around them have. When we have less of these "positional" goods than others, we feel deprived.

[art space]



Every other weekend, Eve Mosher walks or bikes through Manhattan leaving a white line behind her that will eventually be 70 miles long. Mosher is illustrating the extent of flooding due to water levels rising as a result of global warming. Mosher, a trained studio artist, says the idea for **High Water Line** evolved after she saw a photo essay on the shrinking glaciers and "was awed by the power of the visual message." However the lines, which are made of chalk and an environmentally friendly pigment, only last up to two days. But that's OK, Mosher says, because the real point of the project, is to get people engaged and talking about global warming. "It's all about the social domino effect." For more info check out www.highwaterline.org.

—Chelsea Ross

For example, many economists believe that people should prefer a 4,000-square-foot home in a world where most people have 6,000-square-foot homes, rather than a smaller 3,000-square-foot home where most other people have a 2,000-square-foot home. But given the choice, most people prefer the house that is bigger than their neighbors' houses, even if it means having less space. Yet when faced with a similar choice about leisure time, people tend to pick the longer vacation, regardless of what other people have. Leisure is less a "positional" good, that is, judged less by comparison with what others have.

When there's great inequality of positional goods, like monetary incomes or house sizes, people engage in an "arms race" that ultimately is not only a futile treadmill for most people, but also a distraction from the pursuit of non-positional goods like clean air, a pleasant work environment or leisure. That's exactly what has happened in the United States, Frank argues. As inequality has increased, rich people are buying bigger homes, which pressures middle-class families to buy bigger homes as well, often so that their children can attend average or better schools. But since their incomes aren't rising as fast, they work longer hours, go deeper in debt and oppose taxes that cut into their stagnating incomes. They would be better off if there were progressive taxes and regulations that provided more non-positional goods and services (such as health care or mandatory paid vacations), and that reduced inequality.

While no fiery uprising appears to be on the horizon, there are signs of discontent with CEO excess, Bush's tax cuts for the rich and the financial squeeze on both poor and middle-income families. Even in Arkansas, popular support for a state minimum wage increase last year prompted the legislature to enact it before the local Let Justice Roll movement could put an initiative on the ballot. Organized labor and a group of think tanks are discussing plans for a new campaign against "extreme inequality," or the roots of Richistan. And issues related to America's growing class divide are playing an increasingly leading role in the current Democratic presidential primary. Maybe a digital-era populism is finally beginning to take on the most recent age of betrayal. ■



Iranian women in Tehran attend a demonstration against women who refuse to observe the strict Islamic dress code.

BOOKS

Unveiling Muslim Feminsim

By Erin Wiegand

THE COVER OF the July 21 *Economist* touted an article about Iran's push to develop nuclear weapons. But the accompanying photo, filling the cover along with the article's title, "The Riddle of Iran," presented a sea of figures in black chadors, floor-length cloths used by some Muslim women to cover themselves—despite the fact that the article said not a word about Iranian women. The riddle of Iran, the photo suggested, is the way that it teeters between modernity (the development of nuclear weapons) and antiquity (the omnipresent chador).

By using the image of the covered Muslim women to question the modernity of the Iranian state, the *Economist* reflects an entire history of Western interactions with Muslim women. As Nima Naghibi argues in *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran* (University of Minnesota Press), Muslim women's veiled or unveiled bodies are frequently used to symbolize the Iranian state as a whole, and particularly the degree to which the state associates itself with the West.

Rethinking Global Sisterhood is a book that not only tears apart stereotypes and assumptions about the significance of Muslim women's dress, but levels harsh critiques against those feminists who invoke "global sisterhood" as their cause

while perpetuating colonial attitudes of superiority toward their veiled "sisters." Western-minded Iranian nationalists and liberal feminists have generally viewed the veiled woman as a symbol of a primitive era, but Naghibi argues that the reality is more complex.

The interpretation of "hijab" (modest clothing) has varied greatly between cultures, classes and time periods. In early 20th century Iran, for example, middle- and upper-class women often wore a chador and facial veil. Full concealment was a sign of higher class status, because it indicated that one did not have to work in the fields. (Peasant women traditionally wore simple, loose clothing with a headscarf.)

As Iran sought stronger identification with Western values in the 1930s (under the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi), the veil became seen as a marker of a tribal past, and "modern" middle-class women discarded it. But by the 1960s, the symbolism had again reversed. Unveiled women were associated with a sinful, corrupt West, and women veiled themselves to proclaim their virtue and, more, importantly, to protest against the Pahlavi dynasty. Following the shah's ouster, many women removed their veils, which sparked a backlash from those men who believed women should not have a choice in their dress; the women responded by taking to the streets of Tehran for several days of women's rights demonstrations.

Naghibi also examines the ways the state has regulated Iranian women's dress in order to promote or reject an asso-

ciation with the West. In 1936, Reza Shah Pahlavi (the first of Iran's two emperors) banned veiling, as part of an attempt to "modernize" Iran. Women who resisted the ban had their veils ripped from their bodies. Naghibi suggests that the 1936 ban was, in many ways, quite similar to the ban on *unveiling* that would be imposed in 1983. Both pieces of legislation, at their roots, attempted to use women's bodies to promote a particular form of nationalism, whether Westernized or anti-imperialist. "Beneath these two polarized representations," she writes, "lies a desire to possess and to control the figure behind the veil by unveiling or re-veiling her."

Naghibi suggests that the visibility of Muslim women—whether veiled or unveiled—has caused a great deal of anxiety for Western feminists, who have largely ignored the indigenous presence of Muslim women's activism. During the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), for example, Iranian women participated in protests, acted as couriers and even took up arms. Naghibi argues that such actions threaten feminists' perceptions of themselves "as liberated and modern in contrast to imprisoned and backwards Persian women, and ... as leaders of the international women's movement."

Seventy-five years later, little had changed. The feminist writer Kate Millet gushed about the Iranian women's demonstrations in 1979: "It's a whole corner, the Islamic world, the spot we thought it would be hardest to reach, and wow, look at it go!" It was as if the only possible reading of the situation, for Millet, was to see the demonstrations as the direct result of Western feminism's influence, rather than something Iranian women were seeking on their own and for themselves.

Millet had been one of a handful of Western feminists (including Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer) who visited Iran in the '70s and invoked the solidarity of "global sisterhood." But their incursion, Naghibi argues, actually undermined women's struggles in Iran, both by encouraging the growth of an elite feminist movement that neglected lower class and rural women, and by creating an association between feminism and the West—an association that made it easy for the women's movement to be crushed in post-revolutionary Iran, when anything Western was seen as counter-revolutionary and dangerous to the state.

Naghibi's critique of "global sisterhood," a concept prevalent among feminists since the '70s, is by no means new. Feminists of color have been arguing for decades that women's experiences differ greatly between classes and ethnicities—to say nothing of the fact that the vanguard of such a "sisterhood" has tended toward the white and middle-class. But today, Naghibi writes, the "discourse of sisterhood" in the West has led to "a merging of interests between liberal feminism and a xenophobic nationalism. ... [an] uncritical support of the Bush and Blair administrations' rhetoric of the 'us/them' divide, the 'civilized world versus the terrorists.'"

In November 2001, Laura Bush delivered a tear-jerking appeal during the weekly presidential radio address to save the women of Afghanistan from their imprisonment under the Taliban. She invoked the familiar representations of the "oppressed Muslim woman" and the "civilized Western woman" who needs to intervene on her behalf. For feminists who recognize such appeals for what they are—window dressing for imperialist ambitions—it is time to rethink global sisterhood. ■

BOOKS

The Kids Aren't Alright

By Brian Cook

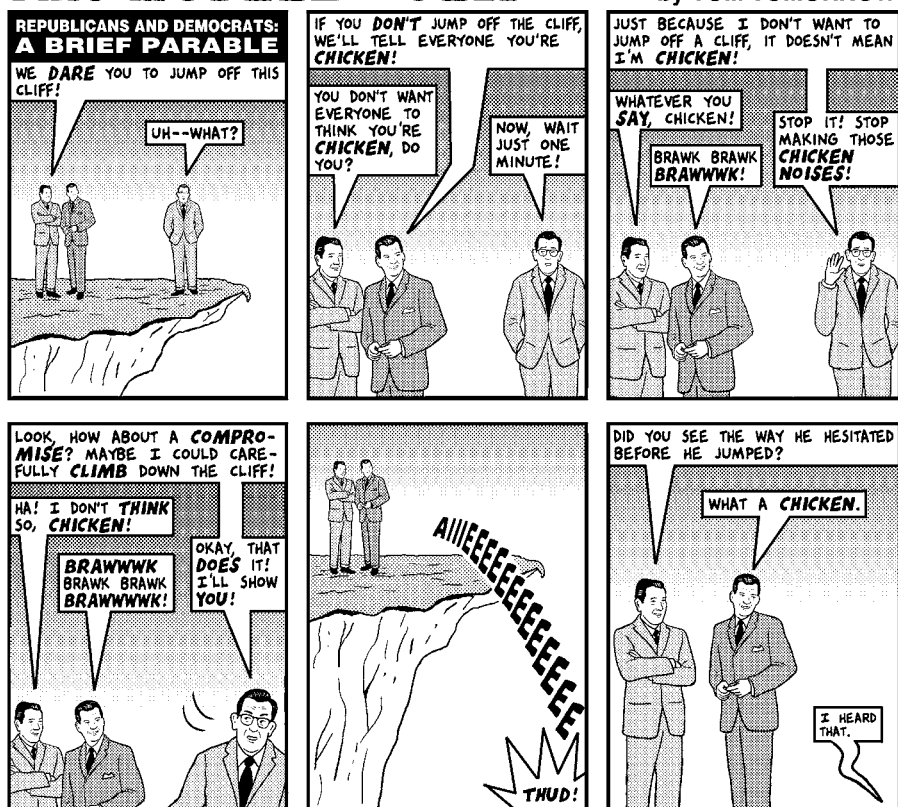
TOWARD THE END of his must-read article about race and the U.S. incarceration epidemic in the July/August 2007 *Boston Review*, Brown University economics professor Glenn C. Loury argues that, when it comes to understanding criminals, we must "recognize a kind of social responsibility for the wrongful acts freely chosen by individual persons." While not entailing a denial of personal responsibility, Loury writes:

Society at large is implicated in an individual person's choices because we have acquiesced in—perhaps actively supported, through our taxes and votes, words and deeds—social arrangements that work to our benefit and his detriment, and which shape his consciousness and sense of self in such a way that the choices he makes, which we may condemn, are nevertheless compelling to him.

Unless one strictly adheres to the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's maxim that "property is theft,"

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



spotted sea trout in a freshwater system,” he says, “and these mega-water diversions from the river would cause the Barataria to become largely fresh.”

IN MAY, THE CPRA plan sailed unanimously through both houses of the Louisiana legislature and was also approved by Democratic Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco. But implementation must await the final plan of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, due this December, which will include technical implementation details.

Many in coastal Louisiana are unimpressed with the Corps. Environmentalists, commercial fishers and residents all complain that the Corps engages in endless planning and evaluation but drags its feet on implementation.

Greg Miller, project manager for the Corps in Louisiana, says the relationships between the different governmental bodies are convoluted. “We work at the direction of the president of the United States and the United States Congress, and the state of Louisiana works at the direction of the governor of the state and the legislature, and those are two very different forms of authority.”

Miller acknowledges that the BTNEP plan involved more than a hundred representatives of scores of groups, but adds, “The world is a very different place in south Louisiana now because of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita,” he says. “Our intent is not to reinvent the wheel but to incorporate what’s still valid into our effort.”

At the Institute on Water Resources, Law and Policy, one of several nonprofit groups concerned with protecting the wetlands, Mark Davis laughs when asked about the collaboration of state officials with the Corps. “They collaborate like the Israelis and Palestinians.” Davis is worried that more resources and planning will go toward hurricane protection than coastal restoration. While this reallocation is understandable in light of Katrina, it could prove harmful.

“The state plan is very, very heavy on levees,” says Mark Ford, executive director of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana. “With the focus on levees, we fear there won’t be anything left over for restoration elements.” Levees intended to keep floodwaters out of cities like New Orleans and smaller coastal communities also separate those communities from the cyclical river flooding and natural land-building

that created the bayous in the first place.

Enter the concept of “leaky levees.” After joking that those are the levees around New Orleans, Ford says that one proposal in the state plan is to construct levees with gates built into them that would allow water exchange, but would still keep tidal surges out during storms. “It’s just a concept,” he says. “We don’t know if it will work, but it means a lot of structures,

footprint of drilling activities.”

Advocates of restoration say the state and federal government have let a politically powerful industry off the hook.

Sport fishermen (some Louisiana license plates still proclaim the state a “Sportsmen’s Paradise”) add to the problem as well, by motoring through the canals and bayous at speeds that cause wave damage along the shore, contributing to erosion.

When asked about the collaboration between Louisiana officials and the Army Corps of Engineers, Mark Davis just laughs. ‘They collaborate like the Israelis and Palestinians.’

which means a lot of money and we think it’s going to fall to parishes [counties] to operate them, which may not be viable, in which case they would close and we’d be even worse off.”

Davis says there are definitely good aspects to the state’s plan. “The Corps is not responsible to communities and the culture and economy and environmental heritage issues the way the state is. The state has to set the tone, even though it can’t single-handedly implement things.” But he agrees with Ford that “the plan promotes levees first and hopes the other elements fit in.”

Letting industry off the hook

The oil and gas industry, which is responsible for much of the wetland destruction, has not offered to help offset the damage it has caused. Instead, it funds a public relations campaign urging other sectors to fund the actual restoration work.

“You have to remember, when we started drilling the wetlands back in the ’30s or ’40s, no one thought they had any value; it was just swamp land,” says Larry Wall, spokesman for the Louisiana Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association. “And people wanted the oil and gas removed. So using the best technology we had then, we dug canals to get drilling rigs to the site, to get people in and out of the site. We built canals, we built border roads—we did a lot of things we wouldn’t do today. Did we do it on purpose? No. Who knew? It just wasn’t a big issue then and no one recognized the full impact. Now, from about the 1980s, we changed things. We quit using pits, we started mitigating canals by filling in one if we built another, we tried to lessen the

Signs posted by local authorities in Bayou La Fourche calling for a slow speed limit or “no wake” are routinely ignored.

The cost of the war in Iraq juxtaposed to the lack of investment in coastal Louisiana is a sore point with those wanting to preserve the estuary—especially U.S. tax dollars spent to restore the marshes in Shiite-dominated southern Iraq that were drained by Saddam Hussein after the Shiites’ failed uprising in the early ’90s.

“We restored their wetland,” says Ford. “We could do ours for \$30 billion.” A \$30 billion investment is the equivalent of 109 days of the war.

BTNEP’s Kerry St. Pé sounded discouraged in an e-mail message about the current state of affairs. “The new state master plan simply has restoration measures in it that deviate from and contradict the restoration agreement that the National Estuary Program was invented to create,” he wrote, noting that hundreds of people, including representatives from the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the governor’s office worked for five years to create the agreement.

He concluded that many of today’s players at the state and federal levels were not around while the BTNEP plan evolved over the past 15 years. “So we are considered to be just another voice among many, and not the congressionally mandated, watershed-level planning network that we are,” he wrote. “The Estuary Program blended the hundreds of opinions into one consolidated plan. That is of particular and noteworthy value when it is necessary to restore such a complex place. It just needs to be used.” ■

the subjects of first-time author Daniel Brook's new book, *The Trap: Selling Out To Stay Afloat In Winner-Take-All America*, could hardly be considered criminals. Indeed, they are the cream of this country's crop—idealistic, upper-middle class twentysomething Ivy League graduates, who upon entering the world of employment hoping to do good, often find themselves sacrificing their ideals in order to do well. Brook's focus on their "plight" has caused some critics, on both the left and the right, to rub their fingers and play a mournful solo on the World's Smallest Violin for the poor, little rich kids. But *The Trap* makes a powerful argument that, in an era of profound inequality, even the choices of the immensely privileged have become—in a similar if obviously less brutalizing way—as narrowed and socially circumscribed as those of their fellow citizens locked behind bars.

Brook begins with a spirited and appropriately venomous recounting of the past 30 years of conservative and neoliberal economic policies (mindless deregulation, massive tax cuts for the rich, gutting of public subsidies, denaturing unions, etc.), the end result of which has been an Incredibly Shrinking Middle Class and an exploding cost of living in America's urban meccas. One of the lesser examined consequences has been the increasing infeasibility for those who aspire to the security of a middle-class income to work at a socially redeeming job. Artists who can't afford to buy houses might be one thing—societies have in general seemed pretty okay with letting them wallow in Bohemia (and many artists have been content to do so). Brook, however, deftly combines statistics, anecdotal news stories and personal interviews to demonstrate that it's not just the no-goodnik artists who are forced to get by without a house these days. In Boston, 90 percent of the city's teachers have been priced out of the housing market. In Half Moon Bay, Calif., a city councilman had to resign because he could no longer afford to live in the town. And then there's Claire, a 27-year-old employee at a New York City nonprofit that combats the global trafficking of sex slaves. Though she makes \$35,000 a year, Claire has to work two weekend shifts waiting tables just to make the rent on her apartment in Long Island City—that she shares with a roommate.

excerpt



Nelson Peery is a WWII veteran, a civil rights activist and a distinguished author. His newest book, Black Radical: The Education of an American Revolutionary is a sequel to Peery's coming-of-age memoir, Black Fire: The Making of an American Revolutionary. Black Radical picks up in post-WWII America and chronicles the rise of the American Communist Party and the makings of the Civil Rights movement.

With the rest of the recently discharged veterans, I clumsily tried to integrate myself into civilian life. The January, thirty-degrees-below-zero Minneapolis weather was the same, but the old house no longer felt like home. I didn't know how to connect with my brothers. I was eighteen when I left home and twenty-three when I returned. During those years we lived in different worlds.

Talking to the guys in the tavern, I realized how much they hadn't changed, and how much I had. I'd thought I could pick up where I'd left off. I couldn't. There was no point of connection. Even when we agreed, we disagreed. Those who were political at all were anxious to fight for the equal rights promised them during the war. The myth of Minnesota liberalism made the reality of rigid segregation in the city all the more unbearable, but since they

knew very little of the fight for freedom raging through China, India, the East Indies, Indochina and the Philippines, they could only imagine a fight within the system. I had been there and knew our fight was part of the unfolding struggle in the colored, colonial world—a fight against the system. ...

Every returning Black veteran knew we could not get rid of the inequality without destroying segregation. We were prepared to make that fight. It was not difficult to make a first-class soldier out of a second-class citizen. It would prove next to impossible to make a second-class citizen out of a first-class soldier.



Part of Claire's problem is that, despite being accomplished enough to attain a Fulbright grant and a full ride to grad school, she, like so many in her age group, is still paying off her undergraduate loans. Some might wonder just how much longer Claire can keep up this frantic workload before she burns out and settles for one of the better-paying (but socially worthless) gigs that await in corporate America. Others might question whether, if that day comes, Claire should be castigated as a "sell out" for doing so. But Brook, much more profitably, asks, why, in a society as wealthy as ours, are gifted and intelligent young people impelled to make a choice between the socially valuable work that many of them want to do and the soul-deadening work that so many *must* do to obtain the modest trappings (a house, health care, a decent education for their children) of a

middle-class family?

The question points toward Brook's most central argument: For far too long progressives have accepted the "fundamentally antidemocratic belief" that "freedom and equality are competing values." Citing the ideals of Thomas Jefferson, Brook writes, "Only equality [can] ensure freedom; only by guaranteeing a base level of equality [can] each individual be given the freedom to blossom—to pursue happiness."

Too many of the "best minds" of our generation have been forced to forgo the pursuit of their own happiness just to keep up (in some cases, barely) with the Joneses. That many have been granted access to the middle class for that sacrifice is a thin bandage to place over that initial injury. *The Trap* serves as an eloquent reminder that an injury to one (even one relatively rich) is an injury to all. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Climate Change Refugees



IT HAS ALREADY started. The first ripples from rising seas are inundating low-lying areas, threatening coasts and islands. Climate refugees around the world are fleeing regions beset by violent storms, extreme tem-

peratures, melting glaciers, spreading deserts, swelling oceans and other escalating effects of global warming.

Billions of people are at risk and the number is growing. Environmental stress forced more than 25 million to migrate in 1998, according to a Red Cross and Red Crescent study—roughly the same number that fled armed conflict.

Even though specific events often cannot be pinned to global warming, the scientific evidence that climate change is radically remapping our planet forms a cumulative, consistent and alarming pattern. Everyone but the head-in-the-sand dolt and the hand-in-the-industry-pocket hack understands that as large areas of the planet become unsuitable for human life, the sad stream of climate refugees will become a torrent.

As a resident of the small South Pacific island of Tuvalu recently told NPR's "Living on Earth," a man needs only two skills: how to climb a coconut tree and how to catch a fish. On this remote atoll, halfway between Hawaii and Australia, where the land crests a few meters above the sea, the shoreline is visibly receding. Salt from rising tides is poisoning the palms; bleached and dying coral reefs no longer support the fish that support the people.

New Zealand, one of the few countries to acknowledge and plan for the coming flood of climate immigrants, has agreed to accept all 11,000 Tuvaluans, starting with a limited number

each year. Many Tuvaluans live in Auckland, lonely and lost, without the support of community and culture, or the skills to survive an urban life based on money.

In much of South Asia, the irony of climate change is that it creates too little water in some places and too much in others. The summer runoff from mountain glaciers that now provides most of the drinking water to 40 percent of the world's population is rapidly disappearing. And so are myriad inhabitants, forced to leave land their families tilled for generations.

In Bangladesh, refugees who can no longer farm on drowning coastal land are falling inward to cities already crammed with jobless and desperate masses. Smaller than Illinois, Bangladesh has 140 million people, almost half the U.S. population. Imagine what it will be like in 50 years, when the Bay of Bengal is predicted to cover 11 percent of Bangladesh's land.

And then there is New Orleans. At a time when warming oceans fuel stronger storms, this below sea-level city in a hurricane-prone delta sits on sinking lands near a silt-clogged sea.

While the French Quarter parties once again, low-lying areas—which housed mostly African Americans and the poor—lie abandoned. Two years after Katrina, the richest country in the world leaves thousands of its climate refugees to live in poisoned trailers or camp in the kitchens of relatives far from their former homes.

Local and federal governments around the world seem paralyzed by callousness or a refusal to make hard choices. Should they spend billions to protect unsustainable, sometimes toxic land, with ever-stronger levees or pipe in water across hundreds of miles? Can they afford to permanently relocate endangered populations to affordable housing on less vulnerable, more valuable land?

And what about the self-indulgent fools society continues to subsidize—with insurance premiums, taxes or extraordinary and repeated rescues—who insist on building beach houses on eroding sand, mansions in fire-prone hills and sprawling ranches in the bone-dry desert?

Most officials have tallied the political and economic price of acting and have chosen to wring their hands and tread water.

In the days after the storm, some of Katrina's exiles took umbrage at the label "refugee." But they share much with displaced Bangladeshi and Tuvaluans half a globe away: poverty, powerlessness, and the misfortune of living under governments that are ill-equipped or disinclined to make hard choices. Driven from home, history and culture by a warming planet, they also share unofficial status as climate refugees—a category that no international treaties recognize or protect.

Individual countries and the United Nations need to develop policies to define and aid the casualties of dreadful energy policies and reckless consumption; they must expand treaties that protect political refugees to include those who flee the persecution of a deadly climate. And the industrialized countries that contributed most to the problem must contribute most to accepting and resettling climate refugees.

No one knows the winner in the race between the ravages of climate change and the meager but growing measures to mitigate it. But we already know who the losers are. From coral wreathed atolls in the South Pacific to the coast of Alaska, from sinking Bangladesh bearing the weight of impoverished millions, to the drowning city of New Orleans, the new climate refugees are flowing like tears. ■

CONTACT Terry J. Allen at tallen@igc.org

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A Freegan World

Continued from back page

work for money.”

Madeline Nelson, 51, a former high-ranking employee of a major publishing firm, once spent her weeks jetting between New York and Paris, but she gave up her corporate life and all its luxuries to become a freegan. She belongs to a New York-based group of freegans that formed three years ago from the Wetlands Activism Collective, a group that fights for Earth, human and animal liberation.

“I used to have someone clean my apartment, I bought convenience foods, I went for weekly massages to relieve stress. I shopped for fairly expensive goods—shoes, handbags—just for entertainment,” says Madeline. “Now I realize these goods are not rewards at all, that I was selling my time to buy goods I didn’t really need and would never satisfy me. I am much happier living with less stuff, more free time to do what I think is right for me and the world, and with closer, more honest relations with friends and family.”

Madeline now resides in a working-class district of Brooklyn.

“Desperate times call for desperate measures,” she says. “A number of us now feel we’re already in those desperate times—that the consequences of environmental destruction caused by global capitalism, and the binge-and-purge consumption pattern it depends on for growth of ‘shareholder value’ could well be irreversible and could ultimately end, not just the comfortable life as we know it, but life on this planet.”

Freegans believe that most of us are complicit in the suffering of our fellow humans and animals, as well as the environmental destruction of the Earth—even those who appear to be fighting for justice. If you buy into the freegan worldview, well-heeled, astronomically rich icons like U2 front man Bono and former Boomtown Rat/Live Aid organizer Bob Geldof can do nothing to halt this rapidly deteriorating situation because they both operate within the very system that is preventing the hungry from being fed and the homeless from finding shelter.

For freegans, the imperative toward owning inanimate objects and purchasing ancillary services only feeds the beast of capitalist economics. They believe that

housing is a right not a privilege, so instead of paying rents or mortgages, freegans tend to squat in abandoned buildings or live with groups of friends. Because of the pollution emitted from cars and other fuel-powered modes of transportation freegans prefer to skate, hitchhike, walk or cycle. Most famously—or infamously—freegans advocate minimizing waste by recycling discarded materials, including food, through

‘Now I realize these goods are not rewards at all, that I was selling my time to buy goods I didn’t really need and would never satisfy me. I am much happier living with less stuff.’

a practice known as dumpster diving or, more euphemistically, urban foraging.

“Most of the food we find through scavenging is in packages, in durable plastic bags,” Alf says, sounding defensive. “Most of our bin-raiding is done as and when we have the need, usually en route to other things. It is not usually maggot-infested crap you scrape out of a horrible, dirty bin, but usually perfectly good food. Essentially it is quality wealth that is being discarded. Some people are extremely friendly and actively encourage people to come and take food away. Often these are people who can see the common sense in it. At the other extreme there are people who are anxious that people are made aware of how much food is being thrown out.”

From thrusting young bucks, eating out at the most fashionable and expensive restaurants that London, Paris and New York have to offer, to raking around dumpsters and garbage piles for food seems a light year of change. It brings to mind a line from a great song “Walking Down Madison” by Kirsty MacColl and Johnny Marr, “From the sharks in the penthouse/To the rats in the basement/It’s not that far.” Or was it, “From the rats in the penthouse/ To the sharks in the basement/ It’s not that far”? Of course, Alf, Madeline and Martin gave up affluent lifestyles as opposed to losing them.

According to Alf, some 35 percent of all food in the United Kingdom goes to waste. How many of the estimated 200 million children who go to bed each night starving would that help feed? He also says that according to official figures, the United Kingdom discards 3.3 million tons of perfectly edible produce

each year. Alf thinks, however, that this is a gross underestimate. Some foodstuffs, he says, last for weeks and even months after the use-by date has expired.

Alf describes the freegan movement as a loose coalition of people with a real sense of global injustice. They are delightful souls for sure, and, yes, they do have solid principles.

And they are out there, spreading

their message that the world no longer has to accept the plunder of global capitalism. Alf and Martin give talks to university students and hand out freegan leaflets on the street.

Yet, whichever way you look at it, capitalism provides freegans with the food they eat, waste or not. So, aren’t freegans depending on the system they want to change for their own sustenance?

“I think this is an interesting question, and it’s been argued that freegans actually live off capitalism,” says Alfred. “But it’s about waste. There are enough resources in the world to share with everyone. People shared long before capitalism. It’s all about learning to live off less; appreciate what you have and sharing what you don’t need. People have been encouraged through capitalism to fight each other for the world’s resources.”

Maybe he has a point. Doesn’t existence involve a pattern of stark and crazy contradictions? On this corner of the neighborhood, greed plunders the planet, damages the lives of individuals and animals, and calls it globalization. In this weird and distorted district, morbid obesity waddles around with tottering famine, ostentatious overspending sleeps with wretched poverty, mansions with unused rooms mock those sleeping on the street.

The freegans have chosen a fight that will be long and difficult. No doubt, these friendly, principled souls who endeavor to change the world have morality on their side. But is it enough? ■

SERGIO BURNS, a writer in Glasgow, is the author of *Dark Ghosts Rising*, a collection of short stories, and is a regular contributor to *The New Entertainer*, *Contemporary Arts* and *The Extra*.

A FREEGAN WORLD

BY SERGIO BURNS

LET'S IMAGINE THE WORLD as a bizarre neighborhood. On the sunny side of the street some individuals are so rich they can afford to live in castles or mansions. They can travel around the globe in hours instead of weeks, and they throw away enough food to feed a small country. The United States alone produces enough to feed the whole world several times over.

Simultaneously, on the darker side of the 'hood, people die unnecessarily of easily remedied ailments and/or lack of food. Every night, millions go to bed starving, our city streets are barracks to armies of the homeless, and the planet we depend on for our existence is being poisoned to death by carbon emissions and industrial pollution.

Not willing to accept that the world has to be polarized between the haves and have-nots, a new sect of activists calling themselves freegans (a contraction of the words "free" and "vegan") have set out

to change the way we think and act. There are around 400 to 500 freegans in New York City alone, and growing communities of like-minded individuals across the Western World who are living outside of and challenging the established social order.

"I grew up in Australia," says Martin Filla, a 36-year-old freegan now living in London. "A lot of what I saw didn't make any sense to me. I didn't see people sitting down and really sharing meaningfully with each other. They chose to spend more and more time working in jobs they didn't enjoy. I also noticed that the material possessions people had, did not bring true peace and happiness."

Often condemned as "weirdos," or "nuts," in much the same way as members of the now-respectable green movement were referred to in the past, freegans are convinced that a better, more spiritual and humane way of life is possible. Superficially, freeganism may seem like a new age, hippy-dippy approach to the complex machinations of capitalism and an angst-ridden world. And yes, it is perhaps naive; a utopian view of human potential in a world divided by politics, nationalism and religion. But many freegans are well-educated, articulate people who were once high-flying achievers—smart, go-getting individuals who just happen to reject societal norms.

Alf Montagu, 31, from Sevenoaks, Kent, England has a degree in experimental psychology from Oxford University and he had a well-paid job in marketing when he became "disenchanted" with his lifestyle about 8 years ago.

Now he travels the country in a camper van spreading the freegan message. "I thought to myself, 'What have I been educated for? To manipulate people for my own selfish ends?'" he says. "So I gave up my possessions, my flat, my whole way of life. I was letting go of one form of certainty, which was essentially material, and replacing it with a more spiritual certainty, which was more dependent on doing the right thing. I realized I wasn't put on this world to simply

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On a London street, Martin Filla forages for his supper

PHOTO BY MATTIA ZOPPELLARO.